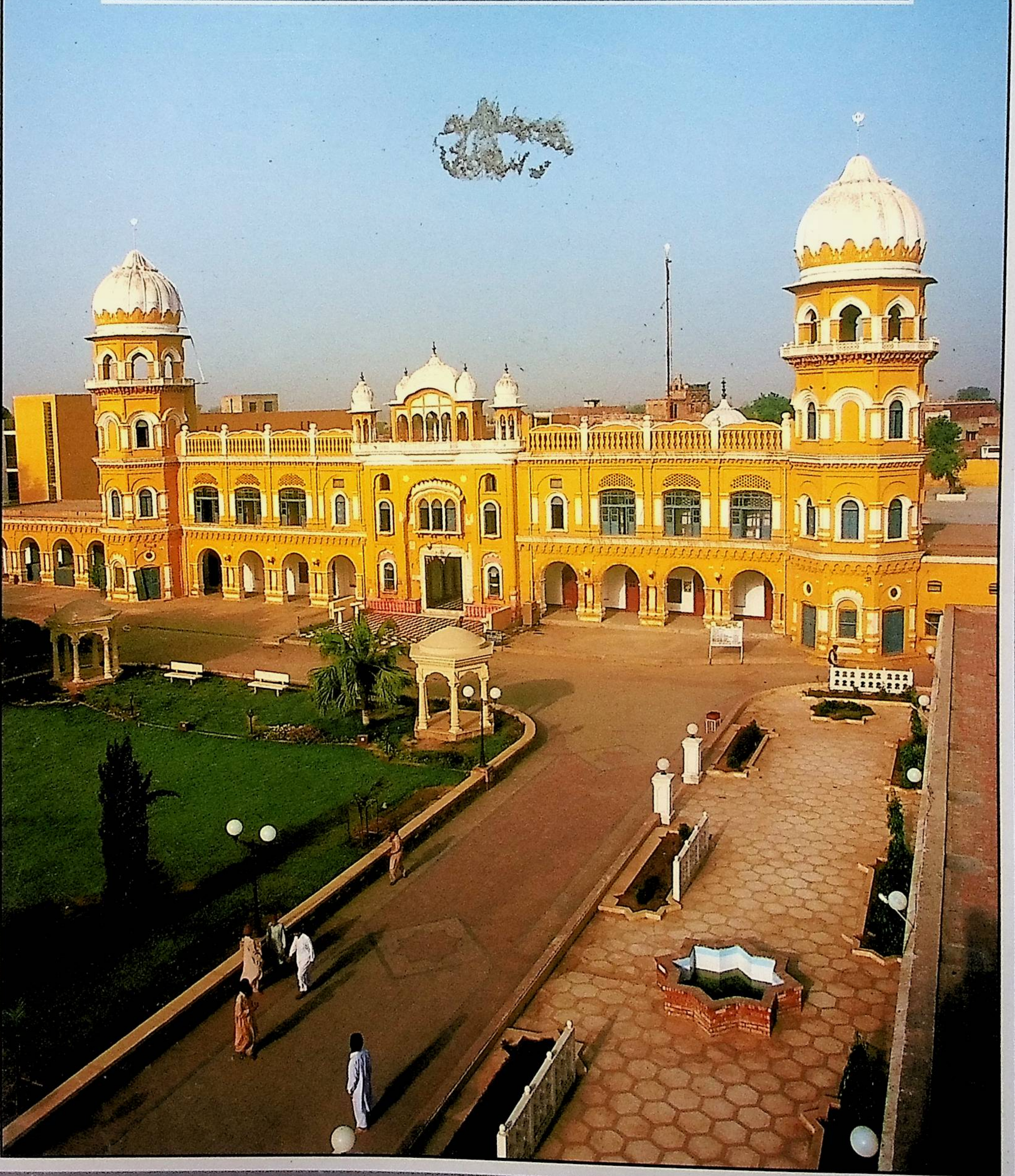
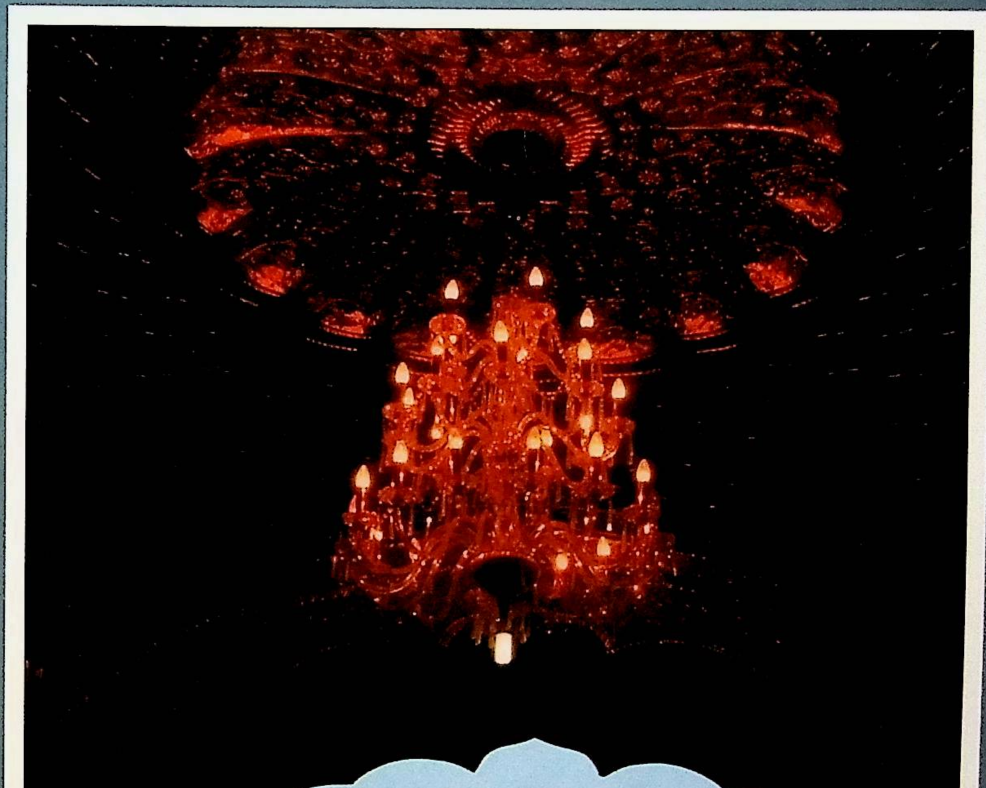
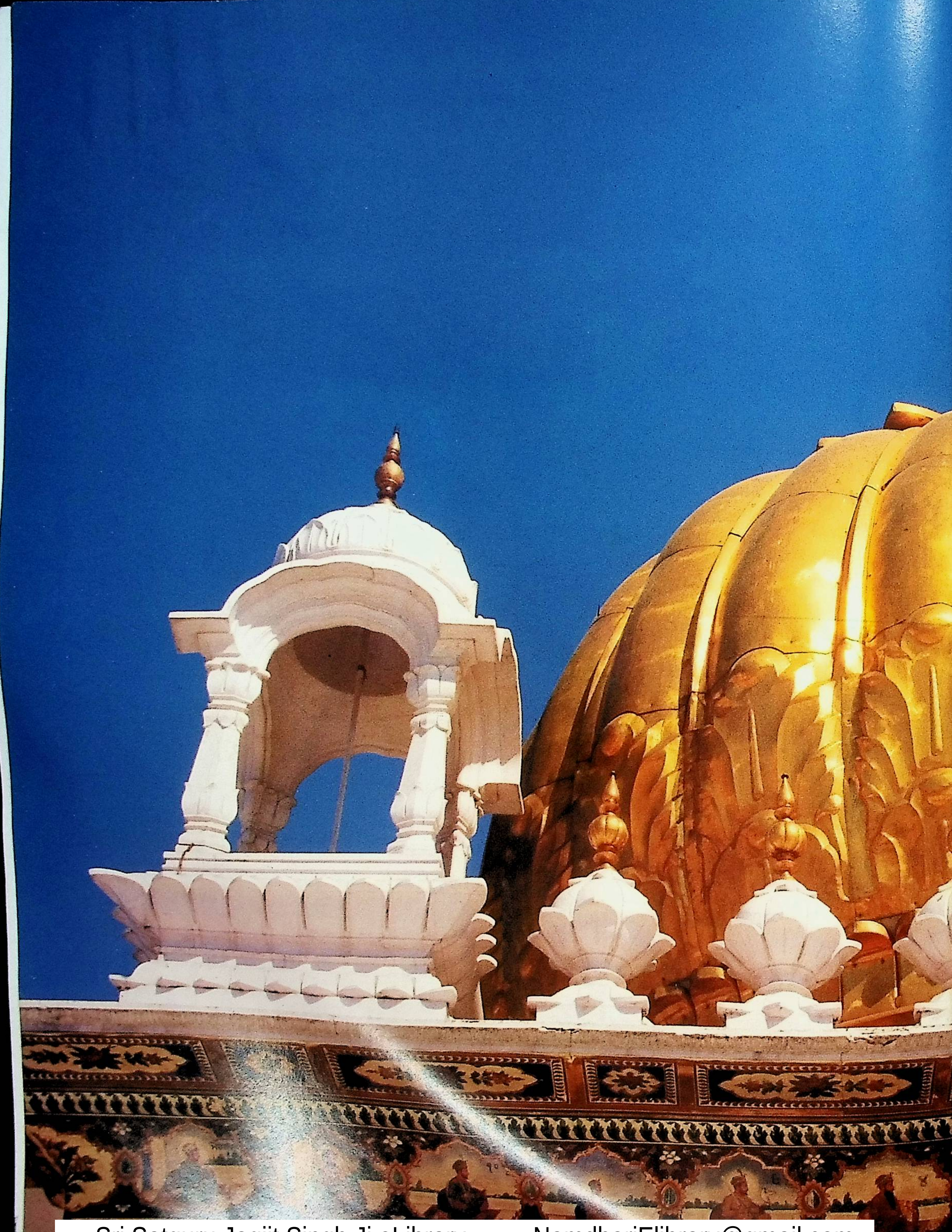
Gurdwaras in India and Pakistan



Text by Mohinder Singh • Photographs by Sondeep Shankar

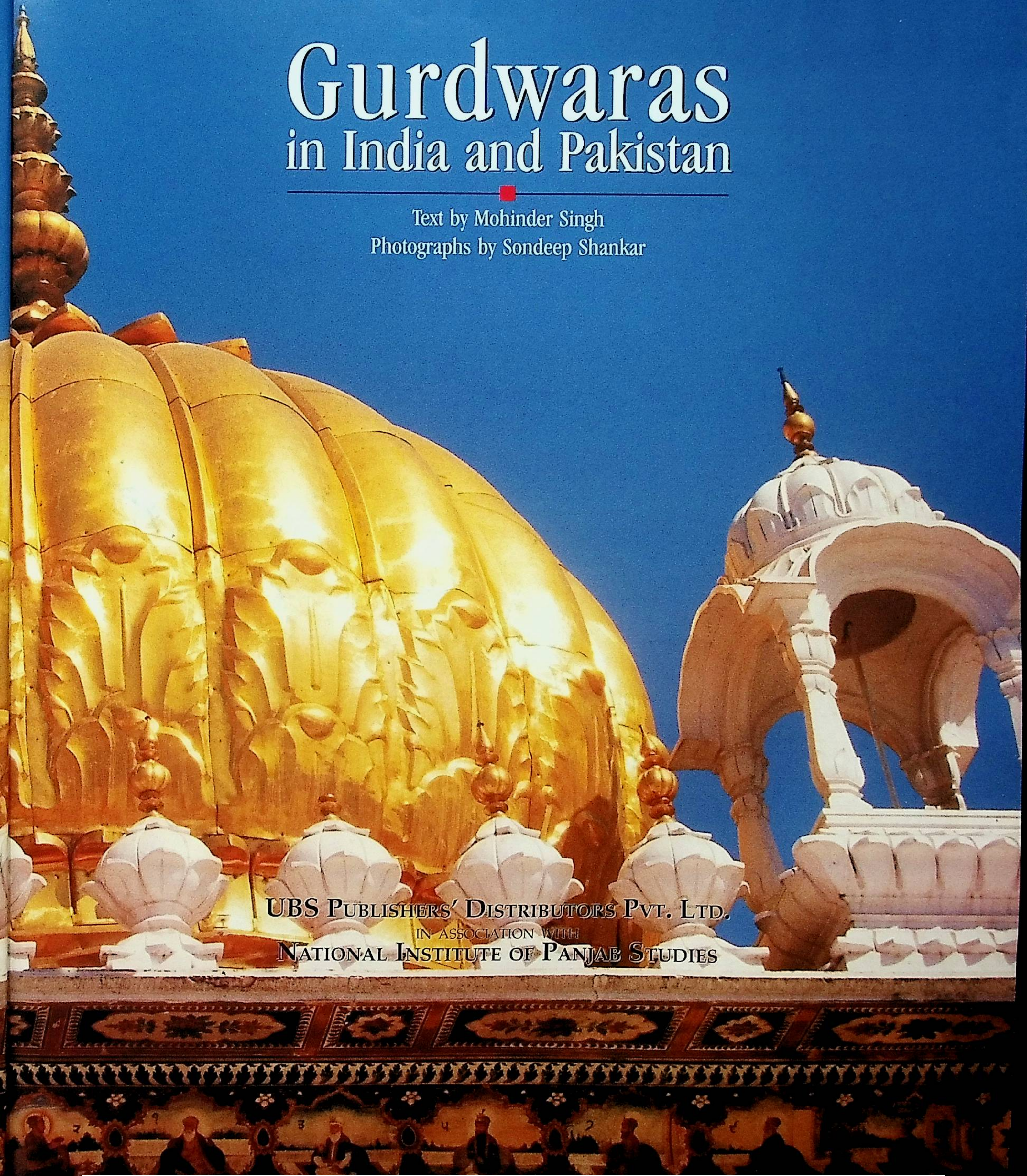
Gurdwaras
in India and Pakistan





Gurdwaras
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Text by Mohinder Singh
Photographs by Sondeep Shankar



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Cover: *Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib*

Half title page: Golden Temple seen through the Darshani Deorhi

Title spread: Gold-plated copula of Baoli Sahib, Goindwal

Series Editor: Dr. Mohinder Singh

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Foreword

The National Institute of Panjab Studies was established in 1990 to promote research on different aspects of Punjabi life and letters. The Panjab University, Chandigarh, subsequently recognized the Institute as an advanced centre of learning. Apart from promoting research, the Institute has also been organising lectures, seminars and conferences. Some conferences were also organized in collaboration with other institutions such as the Department of Multicultural Education, University of London, Department of South Asian Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and the Centre for Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara. To mark fifty years of India's independence the Institute organised an international seminar on 'Partition in Retrospect' in collaboration with the India International Centre, New Delhi.

In connection with the tercentenary of the Khalsa in 1999, the Institute took up a major research project of locating and cataloguing relics belonging to the Sikh Gurus and other historical personalities. Our research team led by the Director of the Institute, visited various parts of India and Pakistan, and located and listed a number of valuable relics. During their fieldwork, our team located some very precious relics such as the *chola* of Guru Nanak, the *chola* of Guru Hargobind, *chola, dastar* and other relics of Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur, sword-belt, *godri* and flag of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Our team took pictures of these and other precious relics and recorded popular history connected with these objects. As a result of the initiative taken by the Institute, INTACH has taken up the conservation of some of these relics.

With a view to sharing the results of our research with the larger audience and creating awareness for proper preservation of the endangered heritage of Panjab and conservation of the valuable relics, the Institute decided to bring out a series of pictorial books under the Panjab Heritage Series.

Four books published in the first phase were launched in the Rashtrapati Bhawan on the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev in November, 2001. In view of the encouraging response the Institute is now publishing another set of four books in the second phase.

The Institute would like to record its gratitude to the Department of Culture, Government of India, for its initial grant for preparing a 'Catalogue of the Sikh Relics', to the Government of the National Capital of Delhi for its financial support for publication of these books and to various institutions and individuals for allowing the Institute's team access to their rich collections. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Governing Council and staff of the Institute, without whose active cooperation it would not have been possible to bring out these volumes.

Manmohan Singh

President
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The National Institute of Panjab Studies acknowledges its gratitude to the following for their contribution to the Panjab Heritage Series:

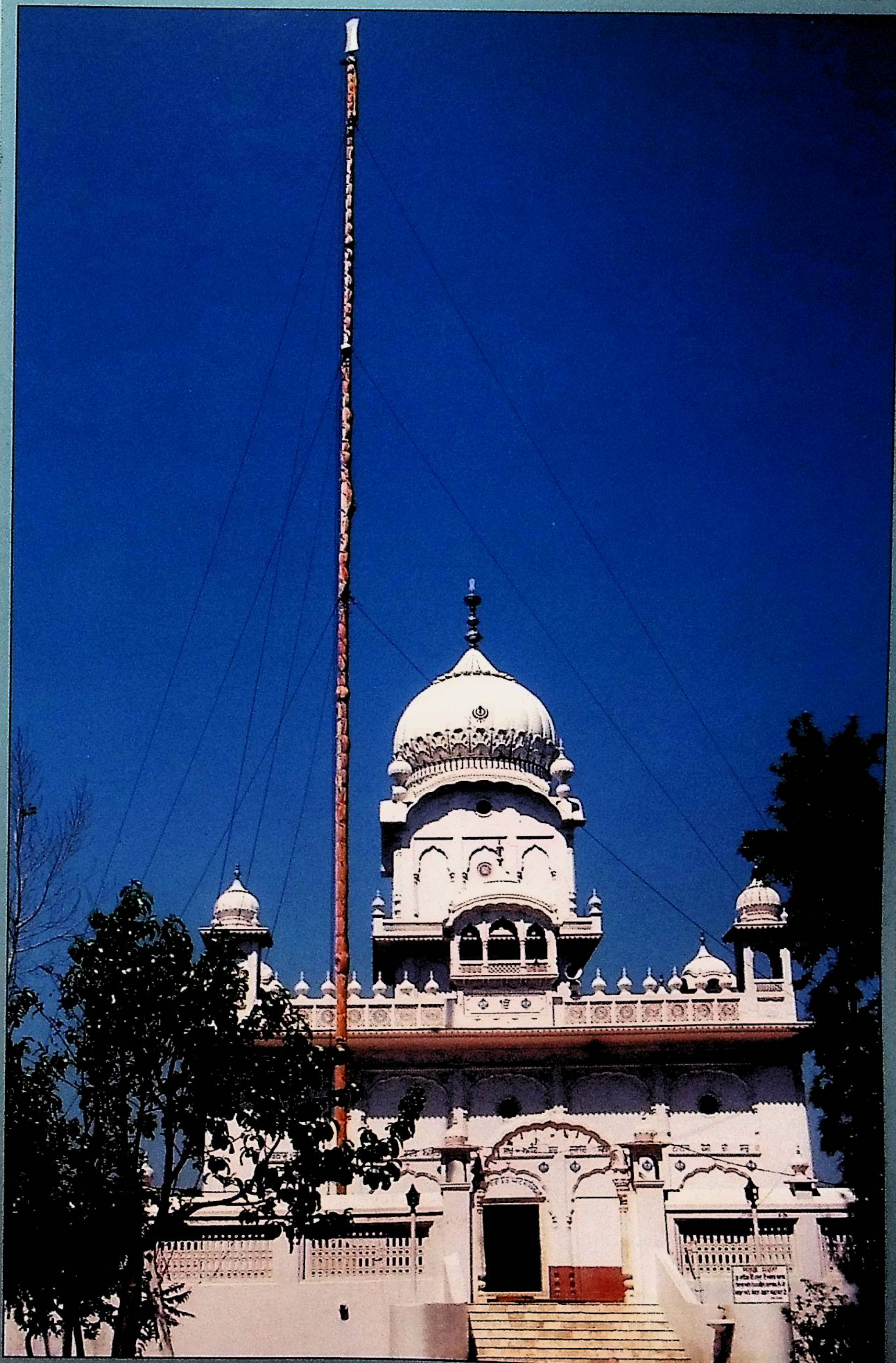
- The National Museum, New Delhi
- The National Archives of India, New Delhi
- The Panjab State Archives and the Panjab State Museum, Chandigarh, Patiala and Amritsar
- The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, for permitting us to take photographs of the relics in the Toshakhana of the Golden Temple and sacred weapons at the Akal Takhat, Amritsar, Takhat Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur, Takhat Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo
- Takhat Sri Patna Sahib, Bihar
- Takhat Sri Hazoor Sahib, Nanded
- The Sikh Regimental Centre, Ramgarh
- Capt. Amarinder Singh, New Moti Bagh Palace, Patiala
- The Bagrian family at Quila Bagrian
- The Sangha family of Drolli Bhai Ki
- Family of Mai Desan, Chak Fateh Singhwala
- Family of Bhai Rupa, Village Bhai Rupa, Dist. Bhatinda
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- Faqir Syed Saif-ud-Din, Fakir Khana Museum, Lahore
- Syed Afzal Haidar, Advocate, Supreme Court, Pakistan
- The Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Facing page: Gurdwara Sant Ghat in Sultanpur Lodhi where Guru Nanak is believed to have re-emerged from the rivulet

Double spread on pages 8-9: Guru Nanak having a discourse with Bahlol, a Muslim seer, in Baghdad.
Courtesy: Nishan III/2000

Double spread on pages 10-11: Gurdwara Antaryamta Sahib marks the site of a mosque in Sultanpur Lodhi where the Guru was invited by the Nawab to join in the namaz.

Double spread on pages 12-13: Takhat Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur
Photo: Dushyant Parasher





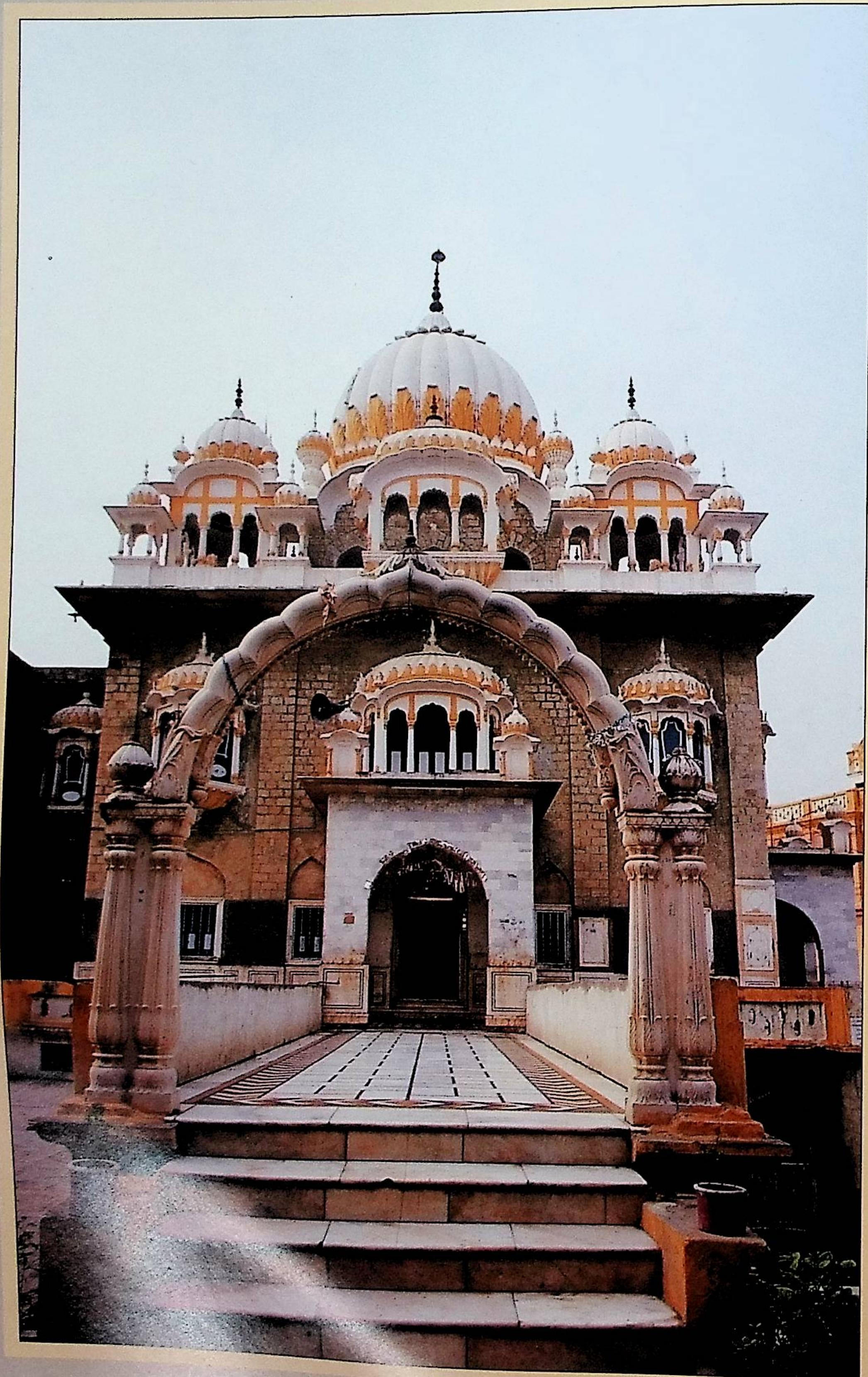








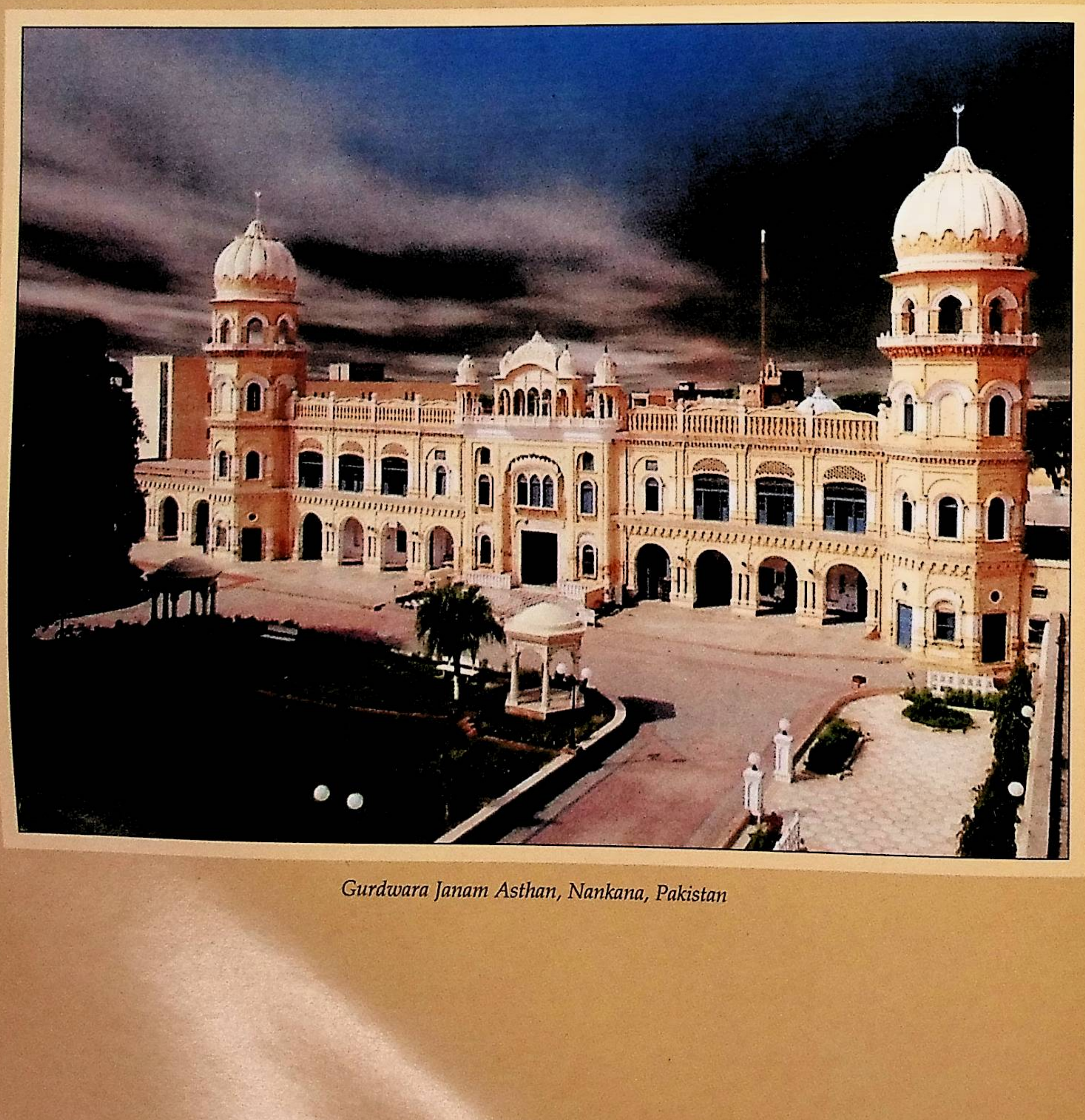

LAXMI



Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Pakistan



Guru Nanak's panja *(palm) imprint, Panja Sahib, Pakistan*



Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana, Pakistan

Distinguished by their distinct forms and symbols, the Sikhs are a virile and colourful community. Though mainly concentrated in the Indian state of Panjab after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Sikhs are settled in almost all parts of India and different parts of the globe. Adventurous and enterprising by nature, they have excelled both at home and abroad. The word *Sikh* is derived from the Sanskrit word *shishya*, which means disciple or learner. Thus, those who followed the path shown by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, came to be known as the Sikhs. It was not until 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru, gave the Sikhs their distinct identity. On the Baisakhi day, which is the first day of the Indian calendar, in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh created the Order of the Khalsa. After initiating the *Panj Piaras*—the five loved ones—with the baptismal nectar, he enjoined upon them and thereby upon all baptised Sikhs, popularly called Khalsa, to carry the five symbols of their faith—uncut hair, wooden comb, iron bracelet, sword and drawers.



Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana
from an engraving on the gates of the Golden Temple

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was born in a village called Talwandi Rai Bhoe Ki, later renamed Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan. After his enlightenment on the banks of the rivulet Kali Bein in Sultanpur Lodhi, he went out on long spiritual journeys to preach his message. Guru Nanak preached strict monotheism and described the Creator as *Ikk*—i.e. One Without a Second. His philosophy is best summed up in his composition named *Japji*, the primal creed of Sikh religion.

To put his teachings into practice in daily life, Guru Nanak started the institution of *gurdwara*, literally the Guru's portal. Gurdwara, earlier called *dharamsal*, cannot be literally translated. The common terms 'Sikh temple' or 'Sikh shrine' fail to convey the spirit behind the institution of gurdwara. Even though Sikhs' most popular gurdwara, the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar, has come to be popularly known as the Golden Temple or Harimandir Sahib to the world, the use of the word 'temple' or 'shrine' does not convey the complete meaning and remains unsatisfactory



Above: The historic van tree in Nankana Sahib, Pakistan, where the Guru hid himself as a child

Below: Gurdwara Sachcha Sauda, Farooqabad, Pakistan

since there is neither an altar nor an idol inside the gurdwara. On the contrary, the presiding presence in the gurdwara is that of the Holy Book—*Guru Granth Sahib*—which is the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs. The image of a gurdwara that comes to our mind is that of a white marble structure with domes and copulas contrasted against the clear blue sky. Its external distinguishing mark is the *Nishan Sahib*, the Sikh flag of saffron or blue colour, fluttering high day and night throughout the year. A typical gurdwara has four doors on the four sides indicating its accessibility to devotees from all the four directions, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex.

According to popular Sikh tradition, the first ever gurdwara, then called *dharmasal*, was established at Talumba, now in Multan District of East Panjab, Pakistan, where Guru Nanak met a *thug* called Sajjan Sheikh, who lived in apparent





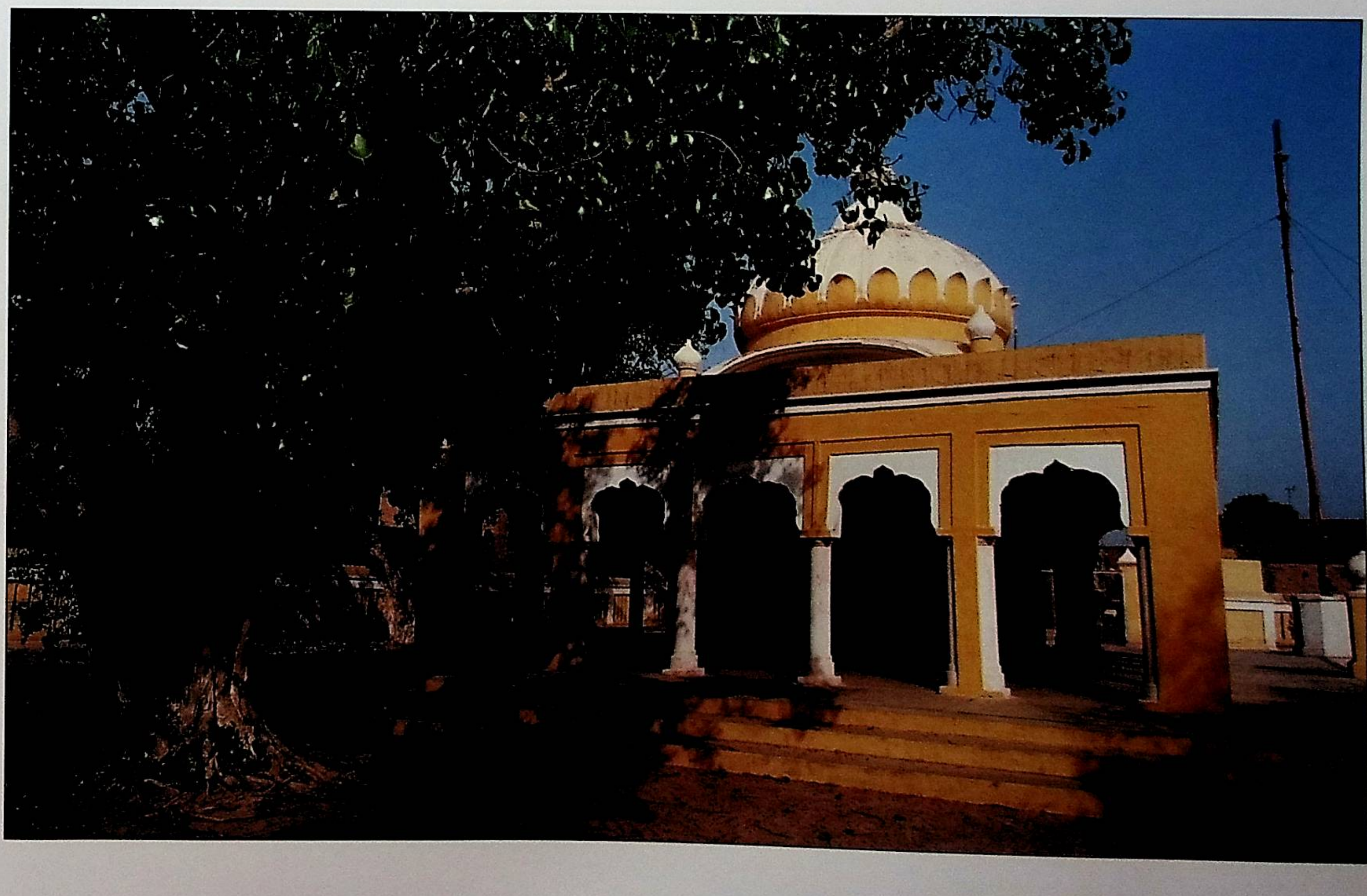
Above: Bhai Lal Ji Rababi, from Nankana Sahib, Pakistan, a direct descendant of Bhai Mardana, a companion of Guru Nanak, performing kirtan *during his visit to India*

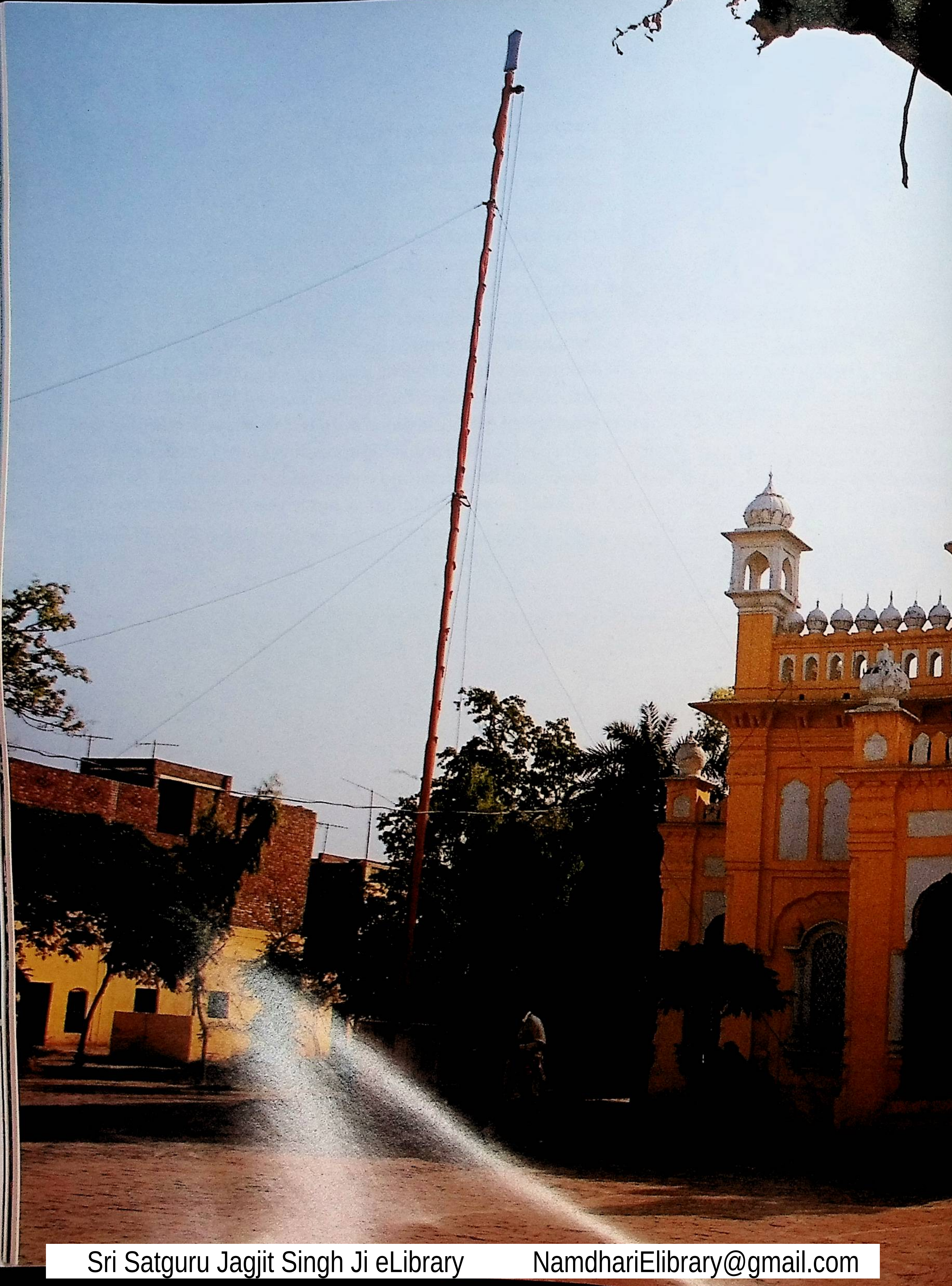
Below: Gurdwara Kiara Sahib, Pakistan, associated with the story of the Guru's cattle having damaged the crop

Following double spread: Gurdwara Tambu Sahib, Pakistan

piety and maintained a mosque and a temple for the night stay of wayside Muslim and Hindu travellers, but killed the sleeping guests and looted their property. During one of his journeys, Guru Nanak, accompanied by his rebeck-player companion Mardana, stopped by the lodge of Sajjan Sheikh. Unlike his other guests, Guru Nanak did not go to sleep but started reciting hymns with Mardana playing on the rebeck. Getting impatient, Sajjan peeped into the Guru's room. Finding the Guru in encaptured devotion, Sajjan was overwhelmed. Falling at Guru's feet he remorsefully confessed his sinful activities and sought forgiveness. Blessed by the Guru, Sajjan gave up all his possessions acquired through deceitful means and spent the rest of his life spreading Guru Nanak's message of love and humanity, and converted his home into a *dharmasal*.

Beginning with Talumba, numerous other *dharmasals* were established to commemorate Guru Nanak's and successive Gurus' visits to various places in different parts of Panjab and the rest of India. According to the *Janamsakhi* tradition, Guru









Gurdwara Malji Sahib where a cobra is believed to have provided shade to the Guru from sun rays while he was asleep



A Janamsakhi painting depicting a cobra providing shade to the Guru
Courtesy: Prof. Pritam Singh, Patiala

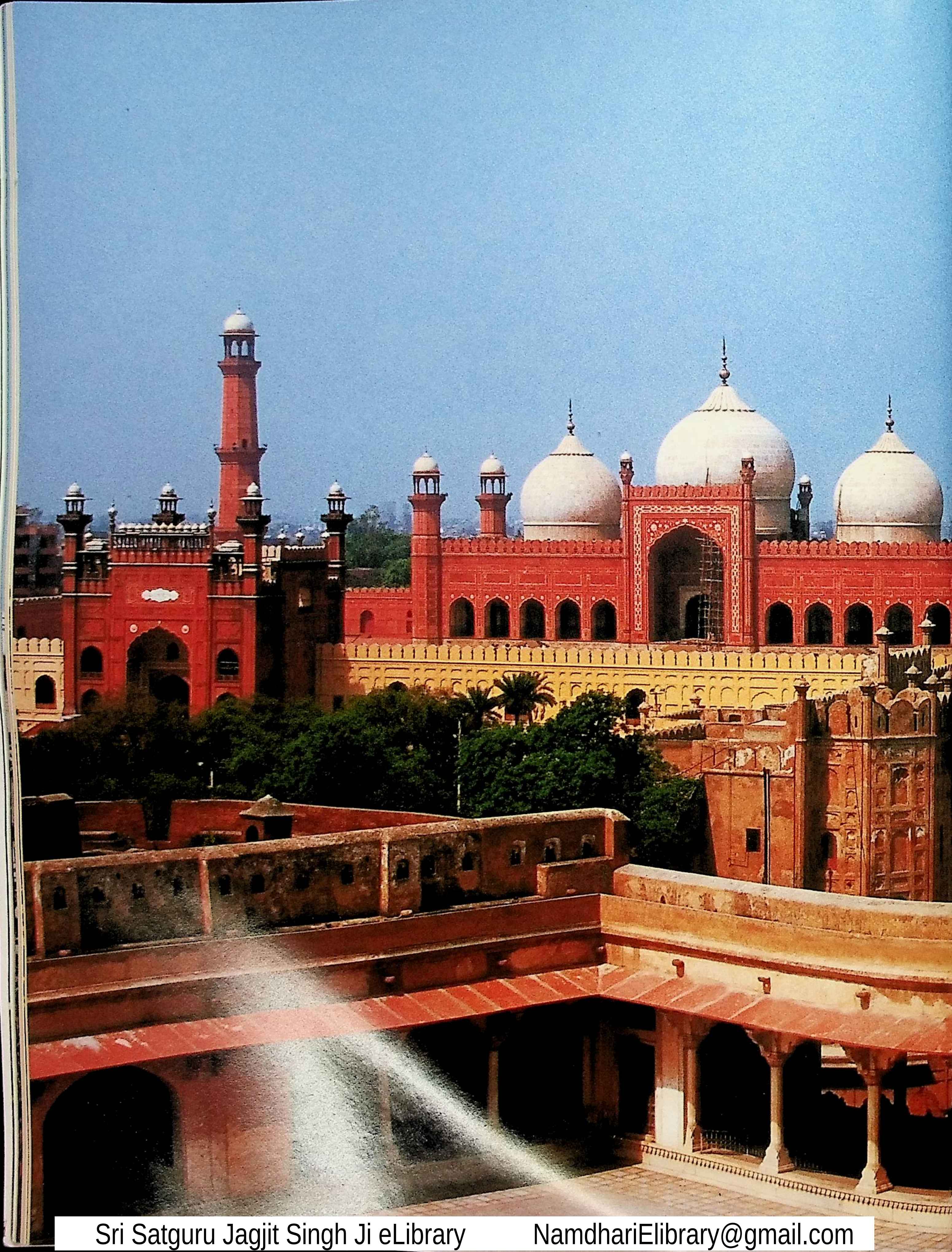


Gurdwara Kandh Sahib, Batala associated with Guru Nanak's marriage



A Janamsakhi *painting depicting Guru Nanak's marriage*
Courtesy: Prof. Pritam Singh, Patiala

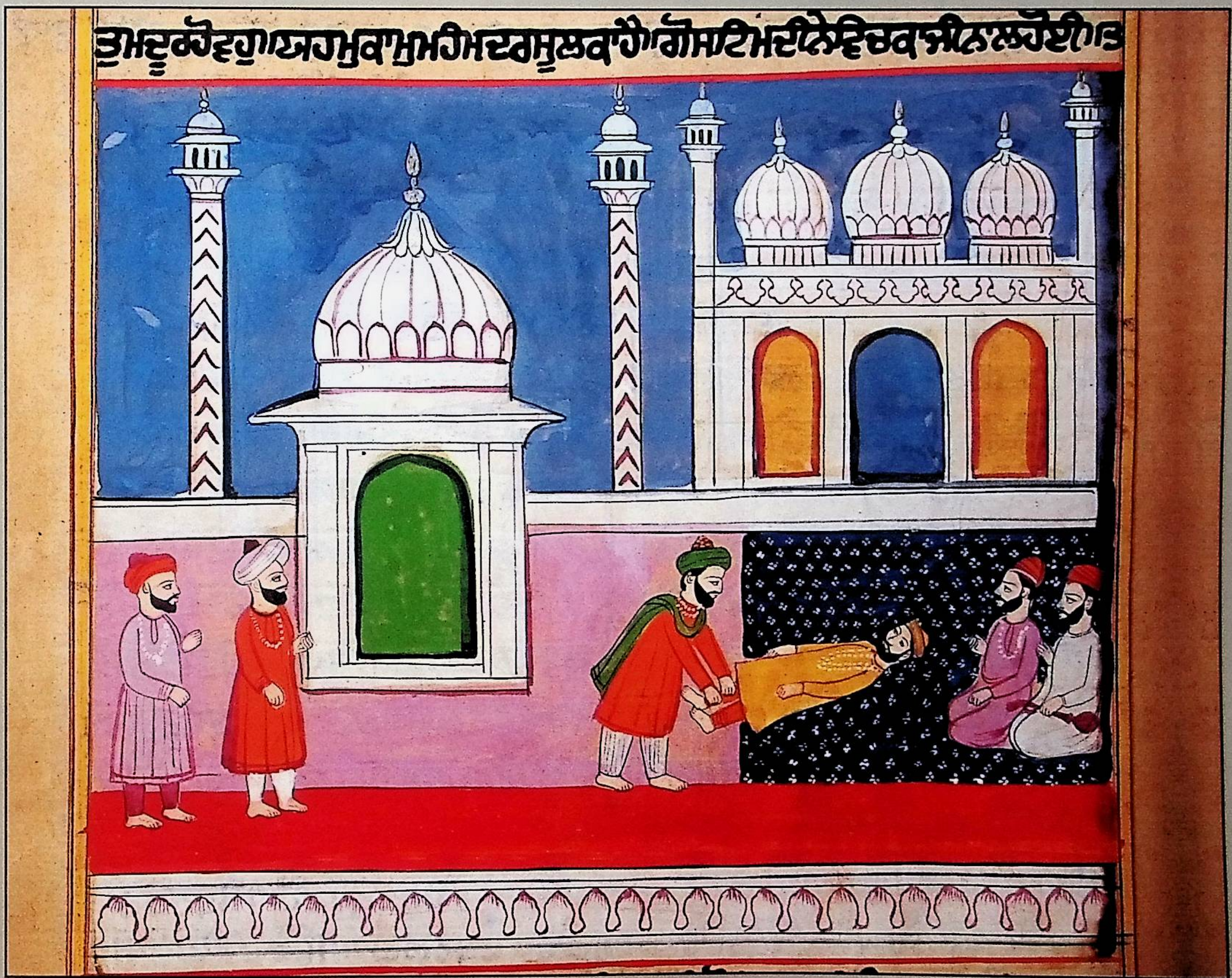
Following double spread:
A rare picture depicting the Naulakha Chamber of Lahore Fort,
Shahi Masjid, Ranjit Singh's samadh *and Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore*



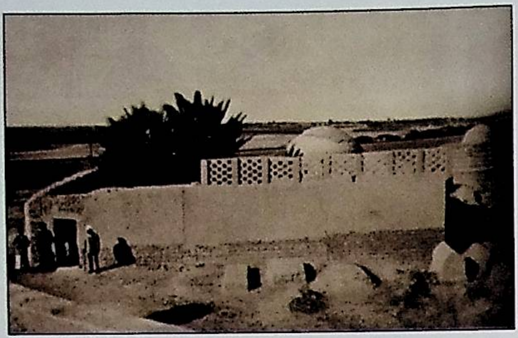




Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak built in the memory of Guru Nanak



According to popular tradition, during his stay in Mecca, Guru Nanak slept with his feet towards the Kaba. A Janamsakhi painting depicts the incident where the Kazi moved Guru Nanak's feet but found to his dismay that the mosque also moved in the direction of Guru's feet, symbolizing the omnipresence of the Creator.
Courtesy: Prof. Pritam Singh, Patiala



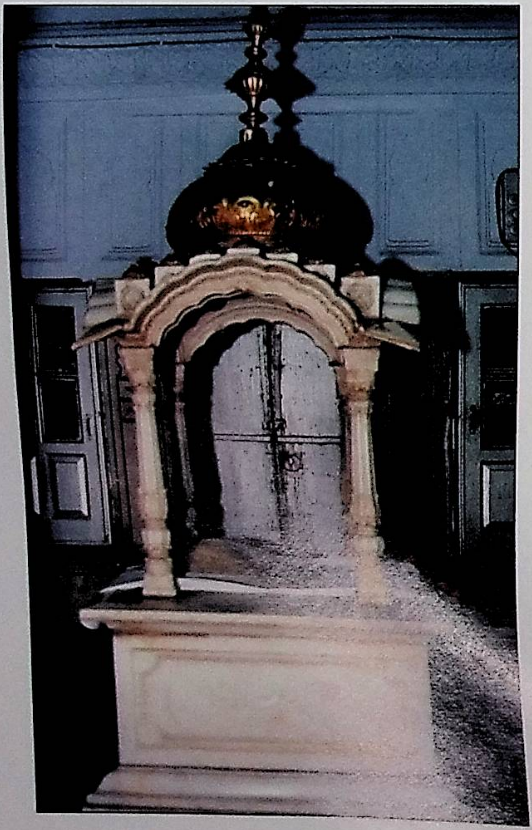
Above: A gurdwara was built in Baghdad to commemorate Guru Nanak's visit to the place.

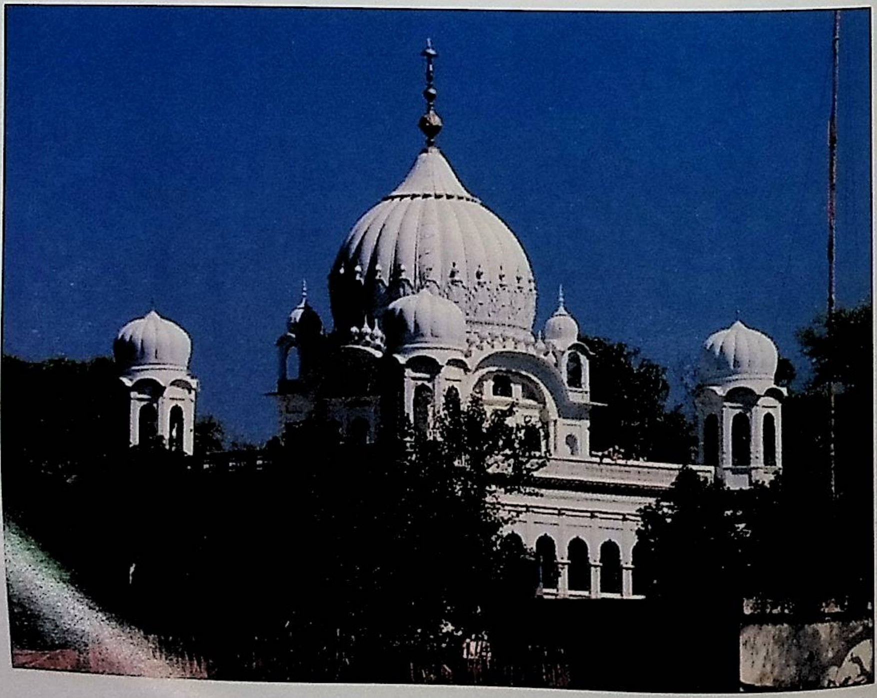
Below: Interior of Gurdwara Dera Sahib

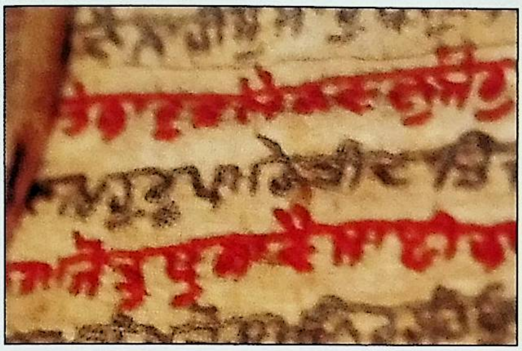
Below right: Gurdwara Kartarpur on the Banks of river Ravi (Pakistan) where Guru Nanak spent the last days of his life

Nanak called upon his followers to establish *dharamsals* and congregate in them to repeat the Holy Name and sing the Lord's praise. Towards the end of his life, Guru Nanak settled on the banks of river Ravi and established a new town named Kartarpur—the City of God. It was here that the Guru established the model of a Sikh society.

In Kartarpur, the Guru worked in the fields and shared his earning with others. A community of disciples grew up at Kartarpur but it could not be described as any monastic order. Rather it was a fellowship of ordinary men and women engaged in normal occupations of life, earning their livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruit of their labour with others. But what was remarkable about Kartarpur was that this provided a model of living, which was to become the basis for the development of the Sikh society and its system of values in the days to come. The Guru and his followers got up before dawn and, after ablutions, said their prayers. The spiritual routine being over, the Guru and his followers partook the sacred food from the community kitchen and then attended to the day's work. In the evening they again assembled at a common place and offered their evening prayers and shared food. Before going to bed they all recited *Kirtan Sohila*, or the songs of acclaim.







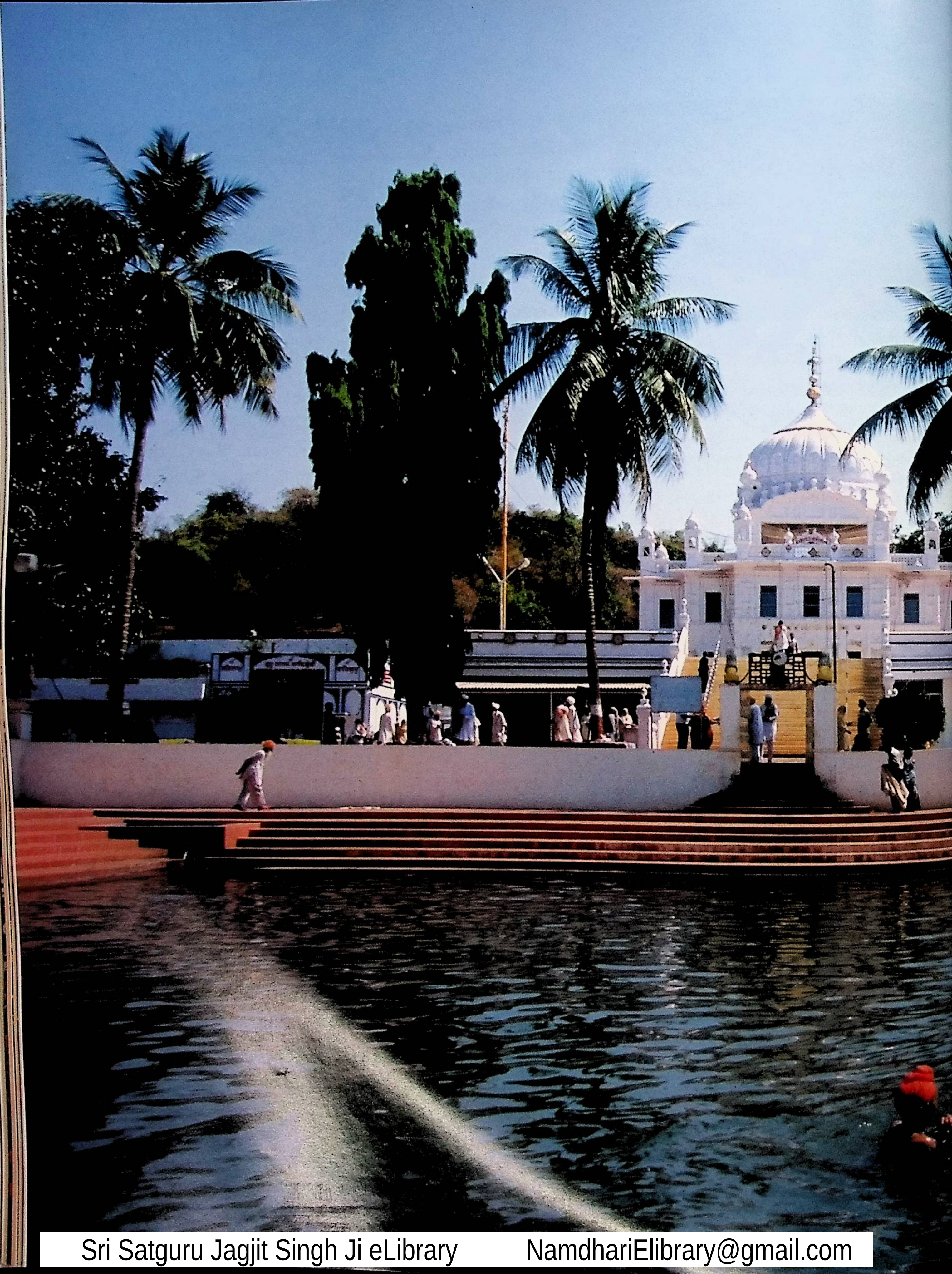
Above: Rumal *of Bebe Nanaki at Dera Baba Nanak with* Gurbani *embroided on it*

Below: The sacred chola *(robe) of Guru Nanak*
It is believed that this chola *was presented to the Guru by a Muslim divine during his visit to Mecca*

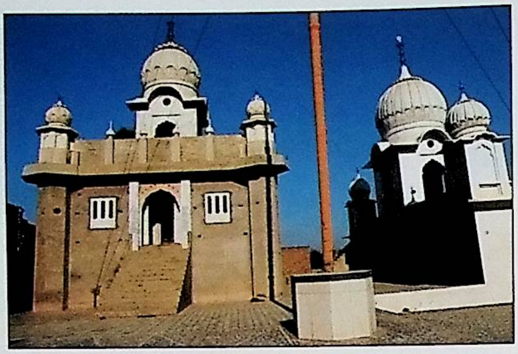
Following double spread: Gurdwara Nanak Jhira in Bidar, Karnataka
Photo: Manohar Singh

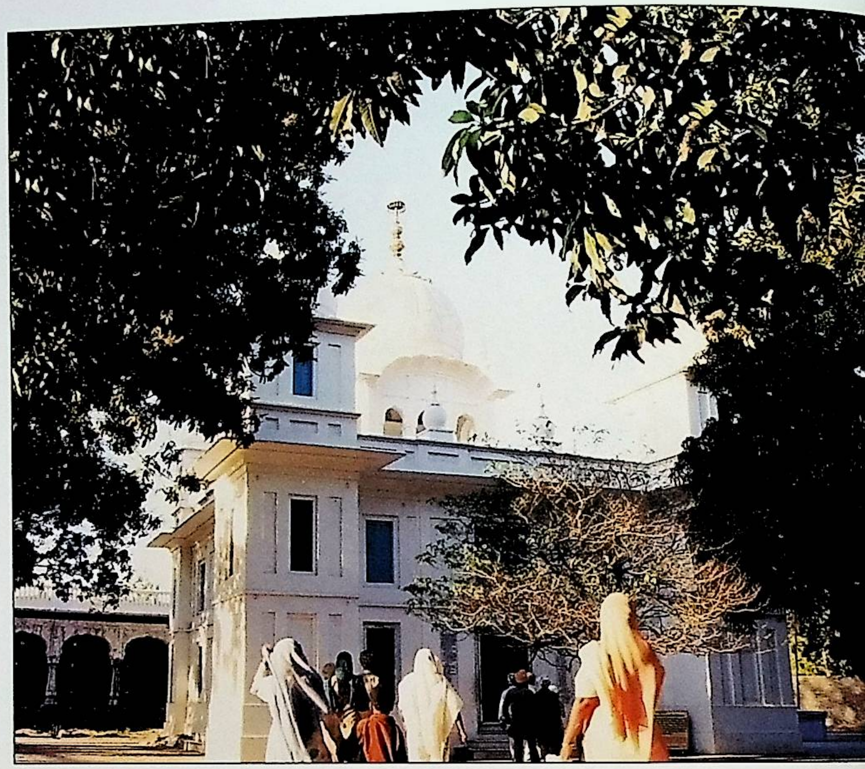
It was in AD1604 that the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, compiled the Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth*, and installed it in the sanctum sanctorum of the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. The Holy Book contained not only the hymns of Guru Nanak and his successors, but also those of the Hindu *bhagats* and Sufi saints. On installation of the *Adi Granth* in the Darbar Sahib and appointment of Baba Buddha, a devout Sikh, as the first *granthi*, devotees from all over flocked to the place. It soon emerged as the central shrine of the Sikhs. The sanctum sanctorum where *Adi Granth* was kept came to be called *gurdwara*, the Guru's portal. With the rise of the Sikh chiefs to political power during the second half of the eighteenth century a large number of gurdwaras were built to commemorate the Gurus' visit to different places or other important events of Sikh history. The Sikh ruling chiefs endowed most of the gurdwaras with liberal grants and tax-free lands.







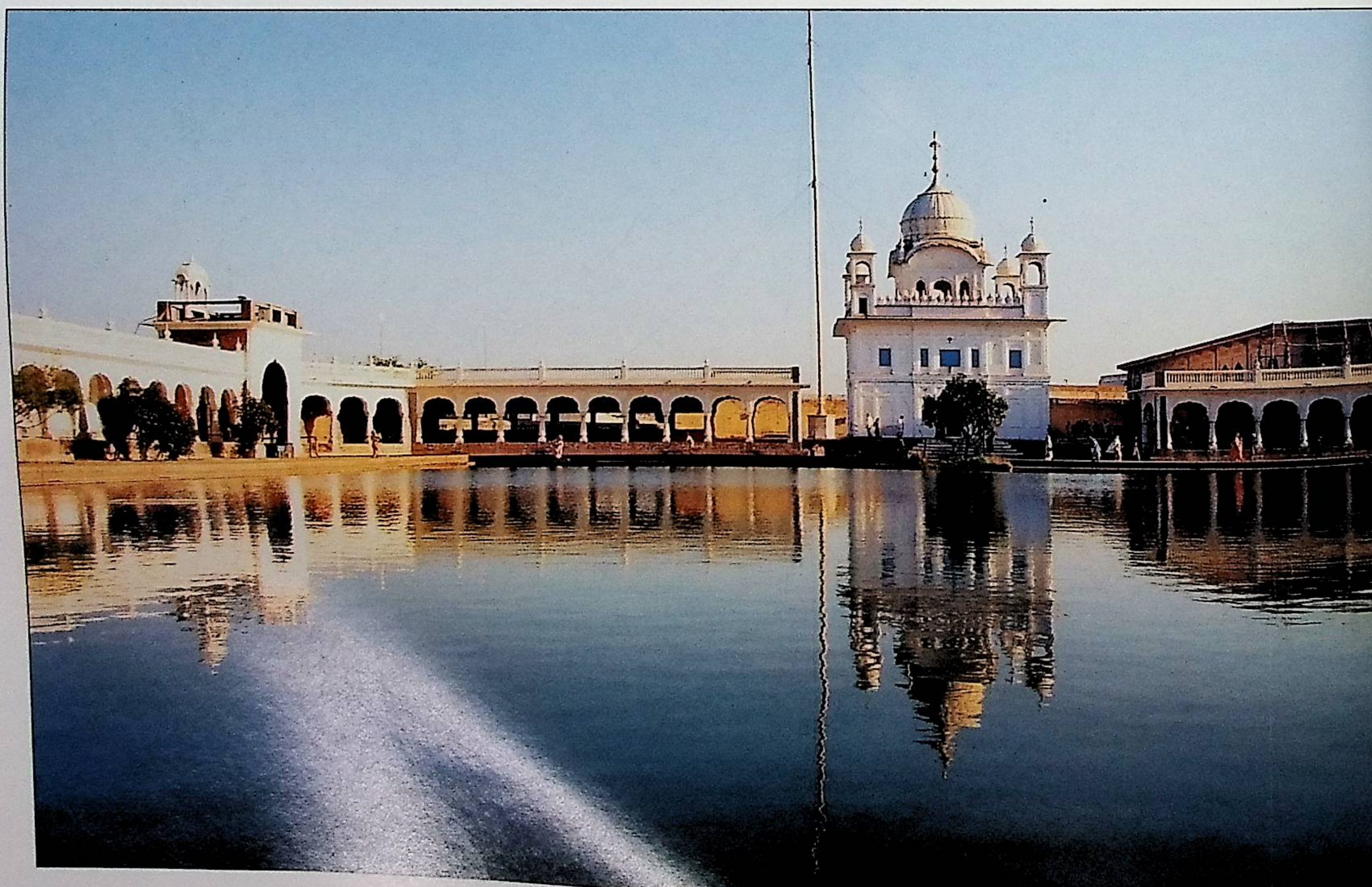




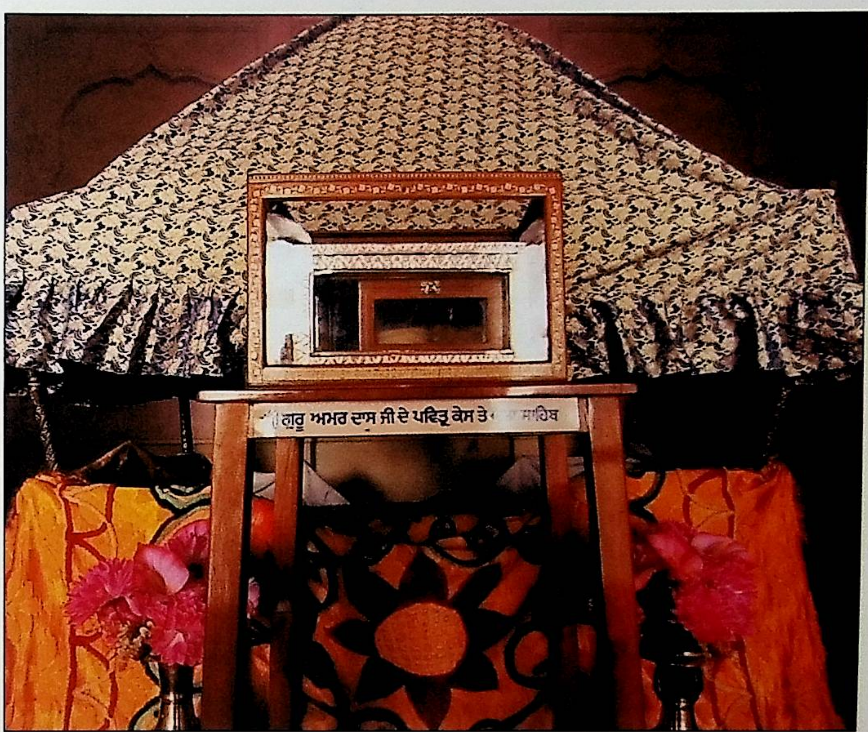
Above: Gurdwara Charan Kamal Sar, (Matte Di Sarai)—birthplace of the second Guru

Right: Gurdwara Tap Asthan, Khadur, marks the place of Guru Angad's meditation.

Below: Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib, Khadur, where Guru Nanak and later Guru Angad used to address the sangat



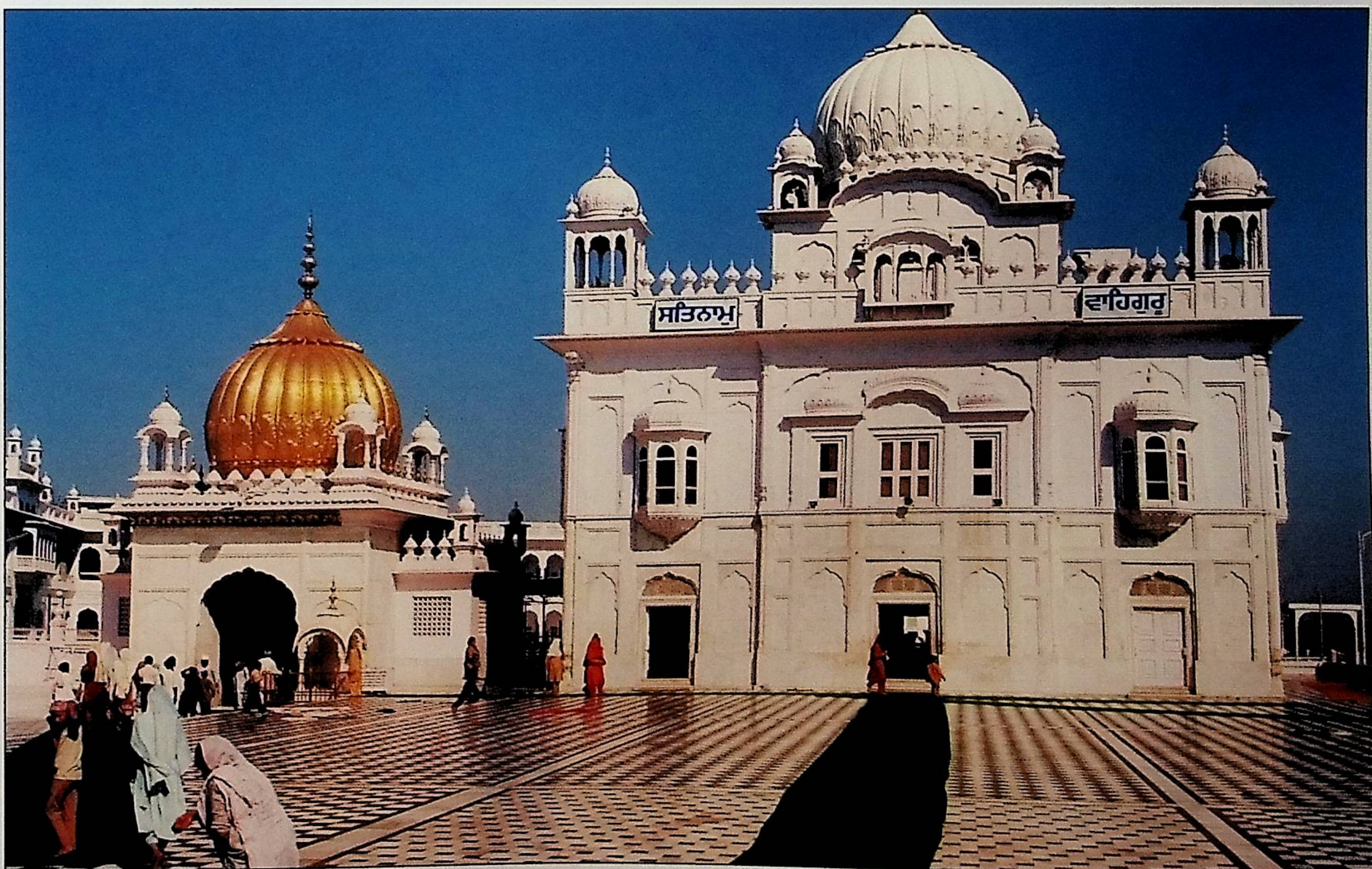




Above: The historic gilded killi *(a wooden peg) is stuck in the wall of Chaubara Sahib. It is believed that Guru Amar Das used to meditate in standing posture holding this* killi*.*

Right: Kes *(hair) of Guru Amar Das preserved in Goindwal*

Below: Close to Baoli Sahib, Sri Darbar Sahib is the main place for daily congregation in Goindwal





Interior of Darbar Sahib, Goindwal, is decorated with murals depicting Sikh Gurus.
This painting depicts the third Guru, Amar Das



Guriai Asthan Guru Ram Das Goindwal, marks the place where Guru Ram Das was installed as the fourth Guru



Gurdwara Guru Ram Das, Goindwal



Gurdwara Chaubara Sahib in Goindwal seen through an arch where Guru Arjan was born

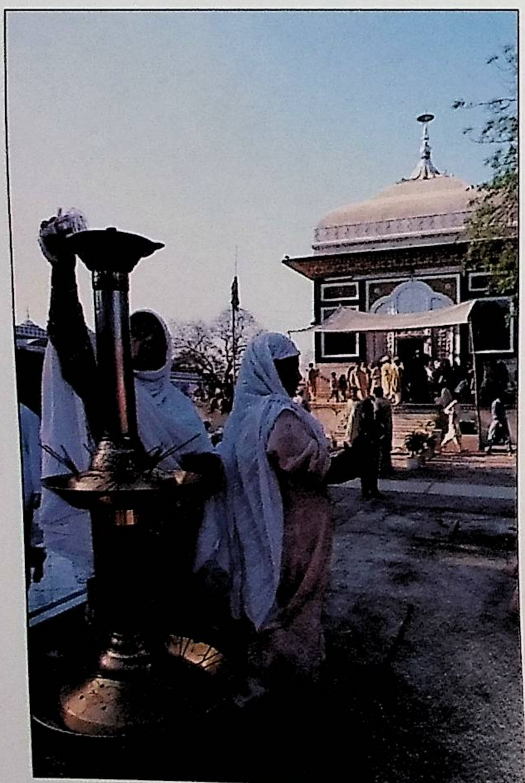
Below: Mian Mir, the Sufi saint, was invited by Guru Arjan to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple. His mazar in Lahore is a popular pilgrim centre for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

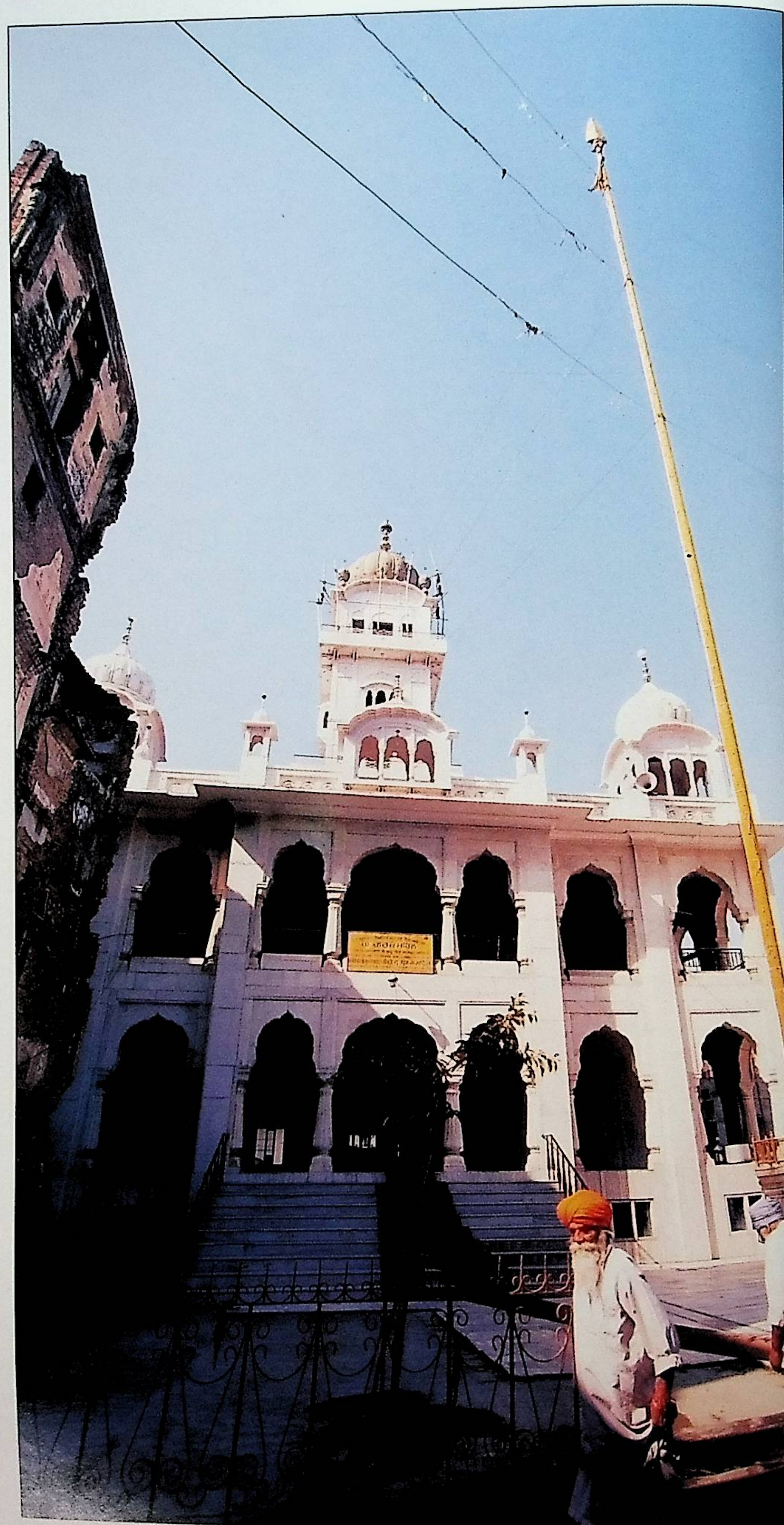
Right: West of Akal Takhat is Gurdwara Guru Ke Mahal, which was used as residence by the Sikh Gurus.

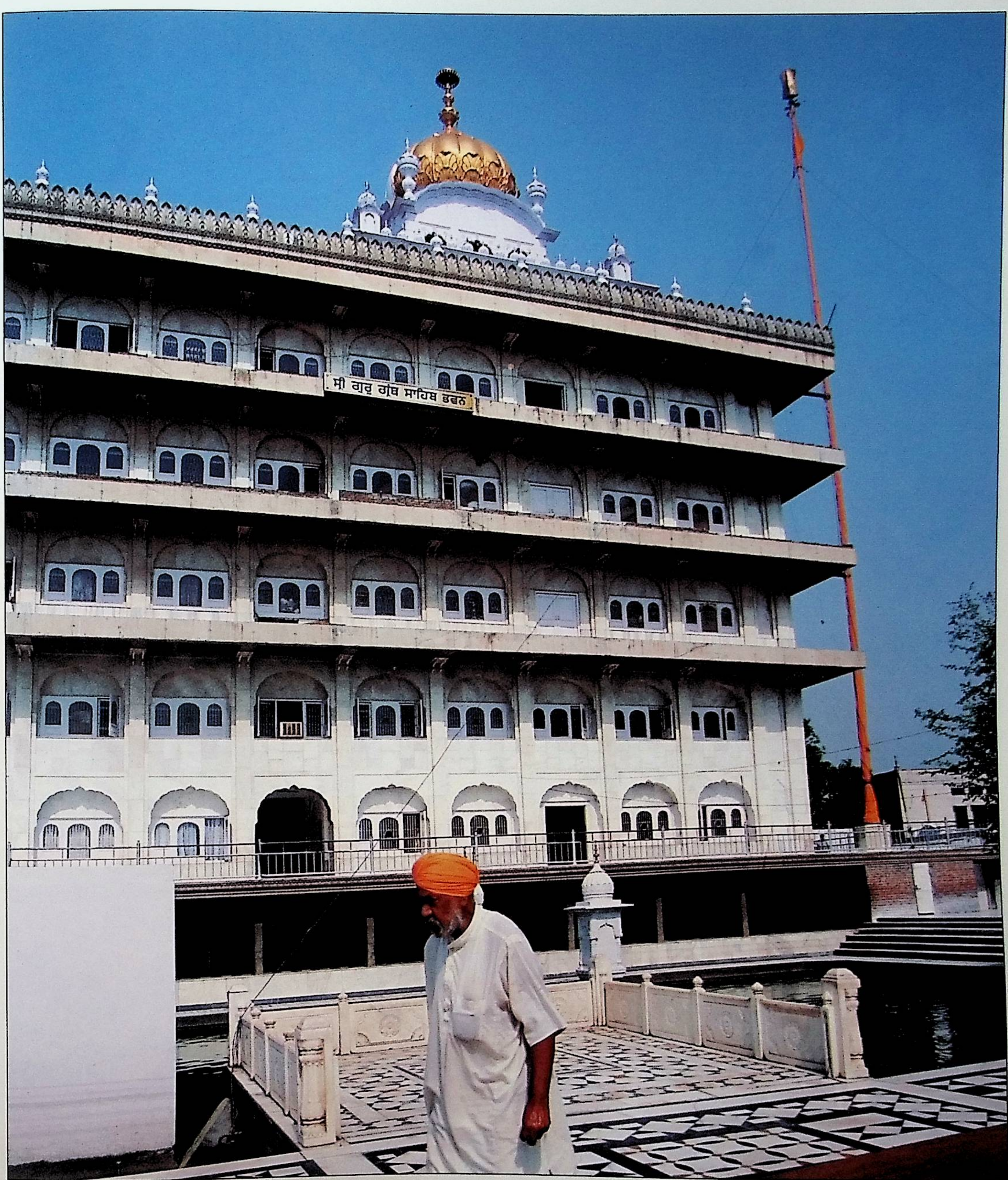
Facing page: Gurdwara Ramsar marks the place where Guru Arjan Dev compiled the Adi Granth.

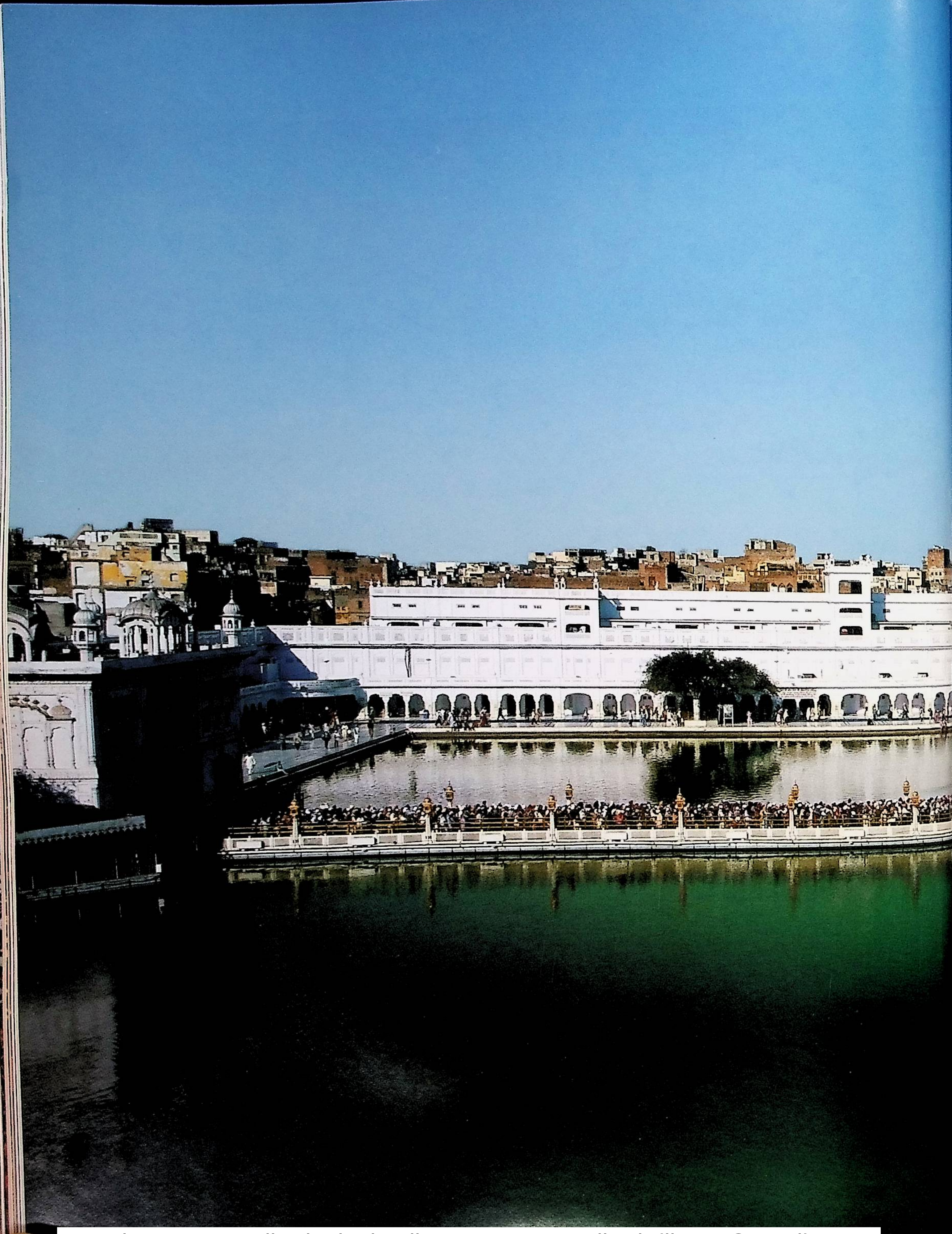
Following double spread: The Golden Temple, the sacred tank and adjoining buildings in the historic city of Amritsar founded by Guru Ram Das. Courtesy: Manohar Singh

Double spread pages 44-45: Inside the sanctum sanctorum, Golden Temple





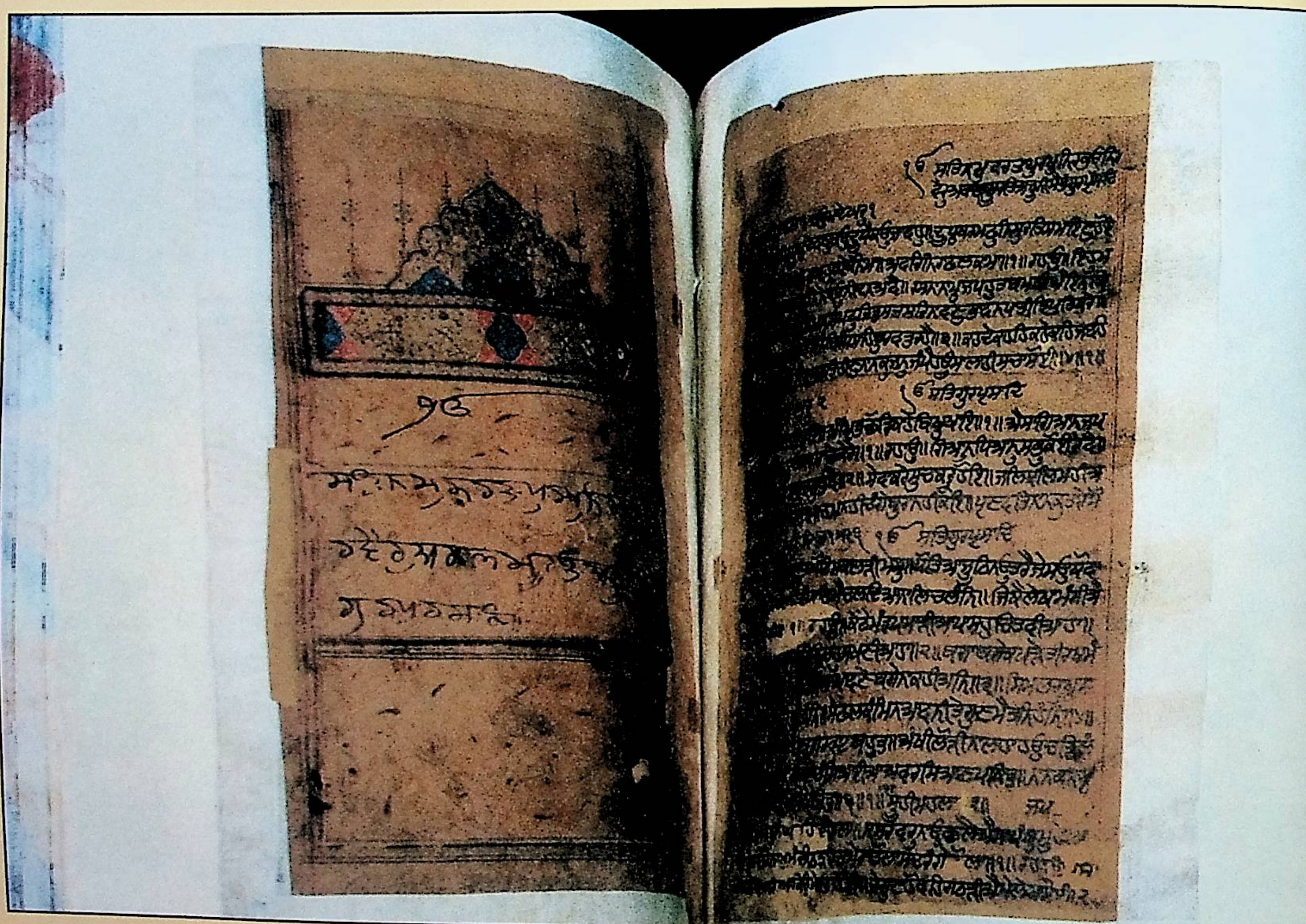

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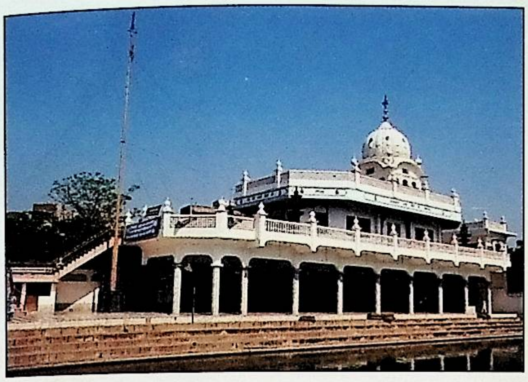


Folio from the original handwritten manuscript called Kartarpuri Bir *with* mul mantra *inscribed by the fifth Guru in his own hand*
Courtesy: Dr. Pashaura Singh



A granthi *reading the handwritten manuscript of* Guru Granth Sahib
in the first floor of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar



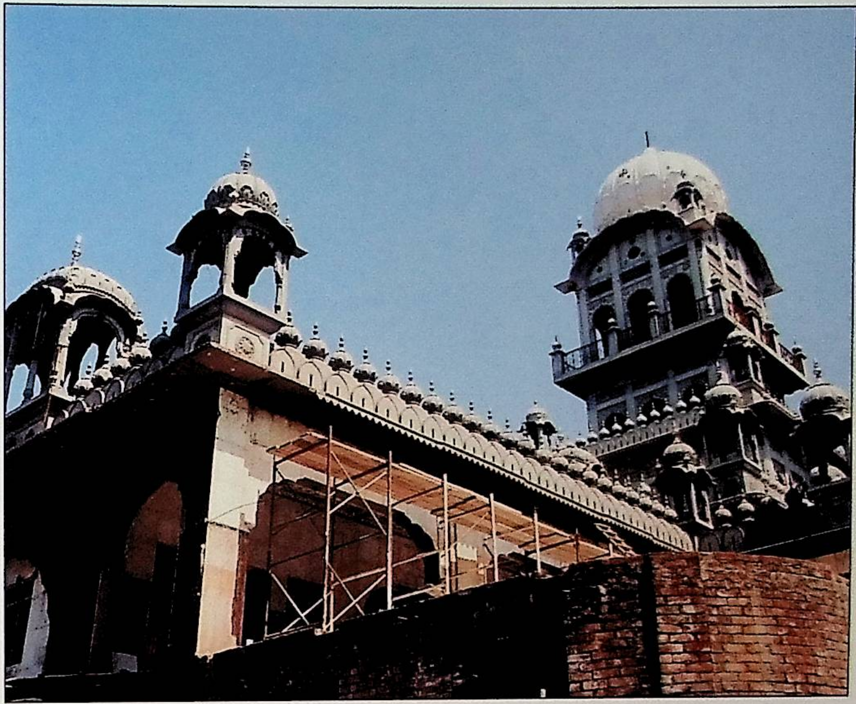


Facing page: Akal Takhat founded by Guru Hargobind, with two flags representing miri *and* piri*, has emerged as the most powerful seat of the religio-political authority of the Sikhs.*

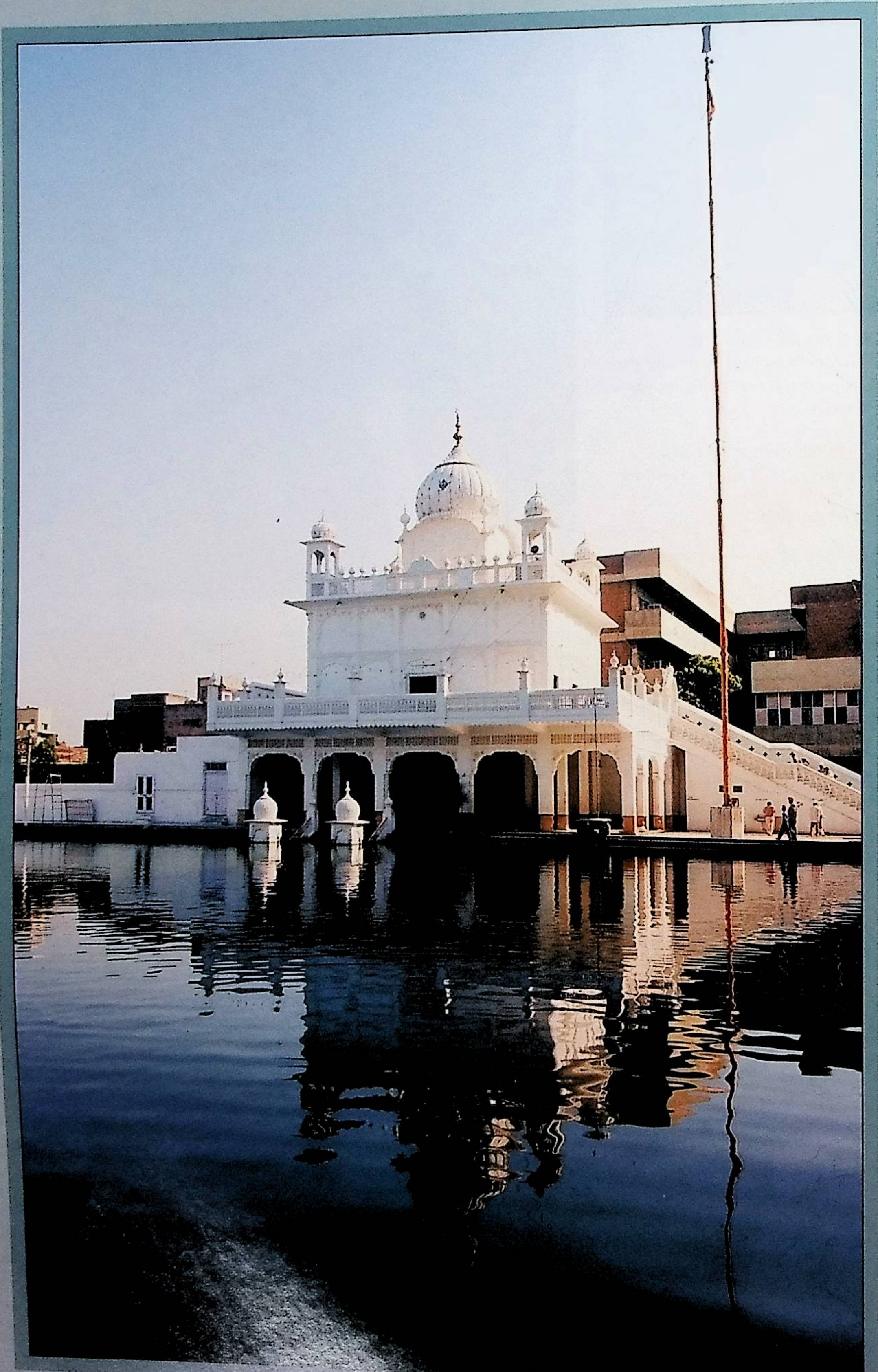
Above: Gurdwara built in the memory of Guru Hargobind's Muslim devotee, Mai Kaulan, Amritsar

Right: Gurdwara Lohgarh, Amritsar

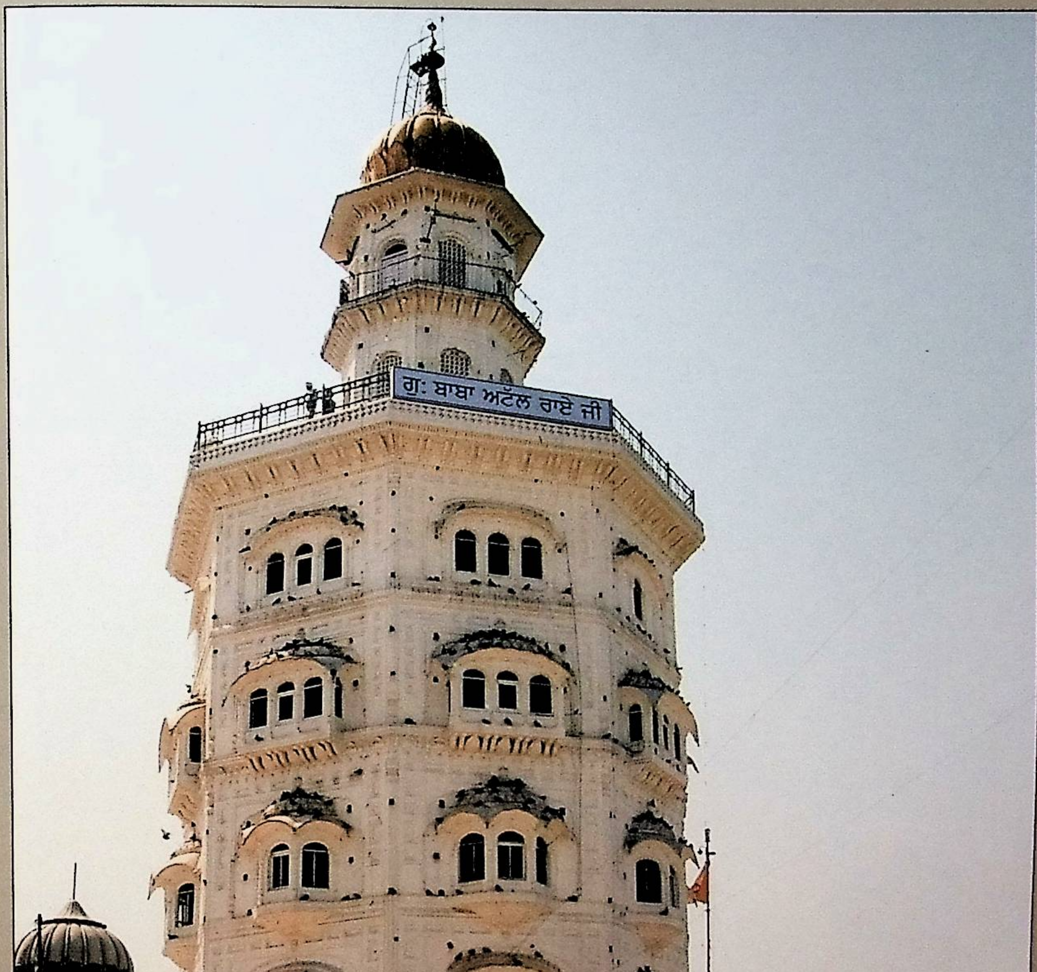
Below: Historic weapons and other relics being displayed at Akal Takhat



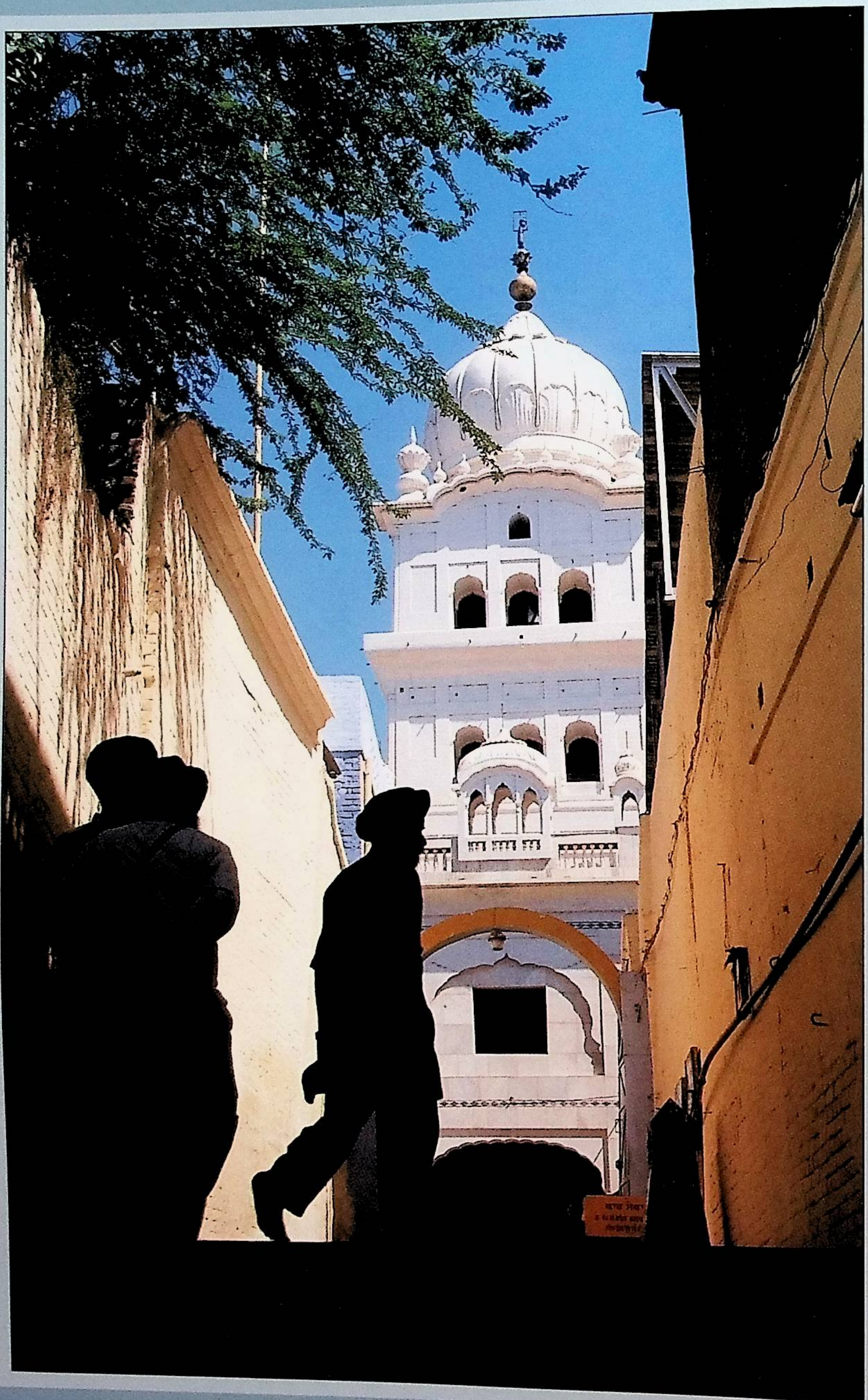




Gurdwara Bibeksar, Amritsar



Gurdwara Baba Atal built in the memory of Baba Atal, Amritsar

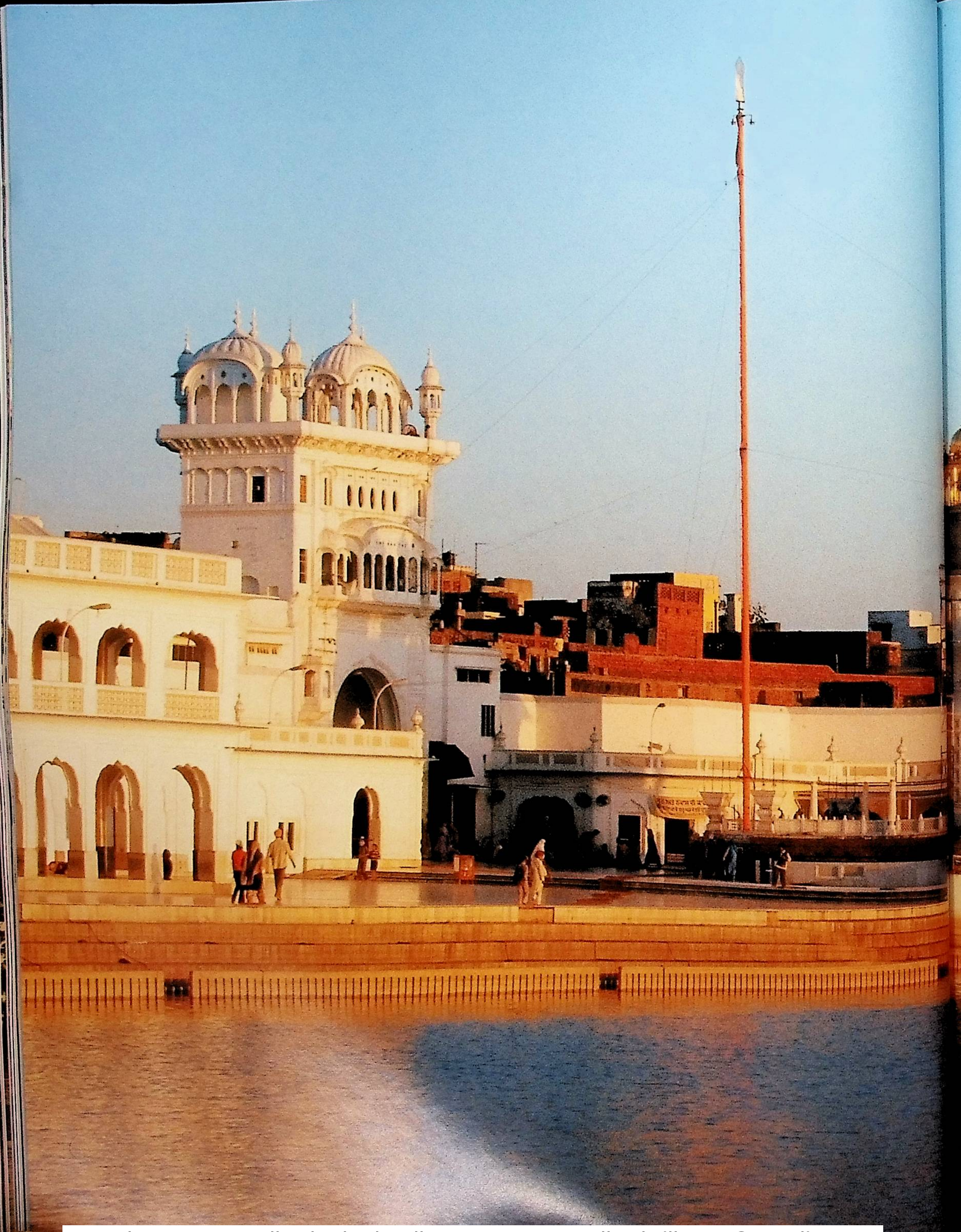


Gurdwara Thamb Sahib, where Guru Arjan Dev laid the foundation of the city of Kartarpur in Jalandhar District

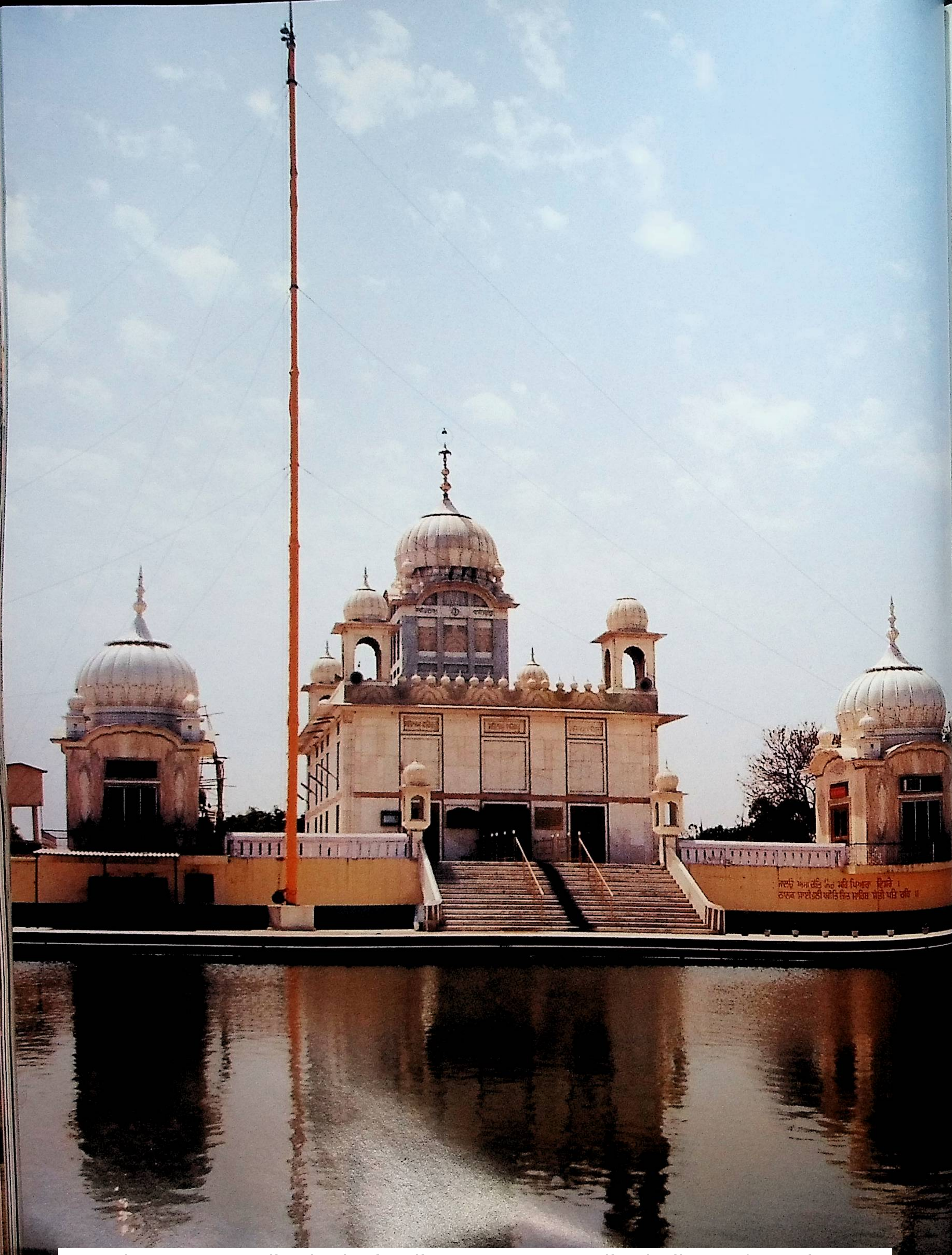


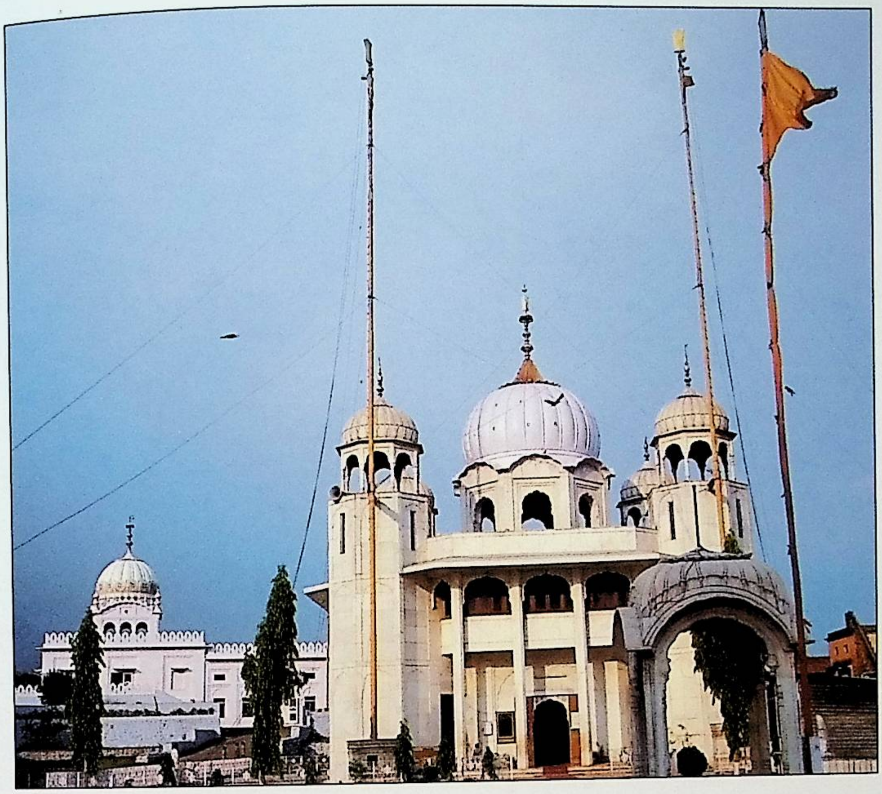
Entrance to Darbar Sahib, Tarn Taran

Following double spread:
Dome of Darbar Sahib, Tarn Taran, being gold-plated











Facing page: Gurdwara Chhevin Padshahi, Thanesar, Kurukshetra

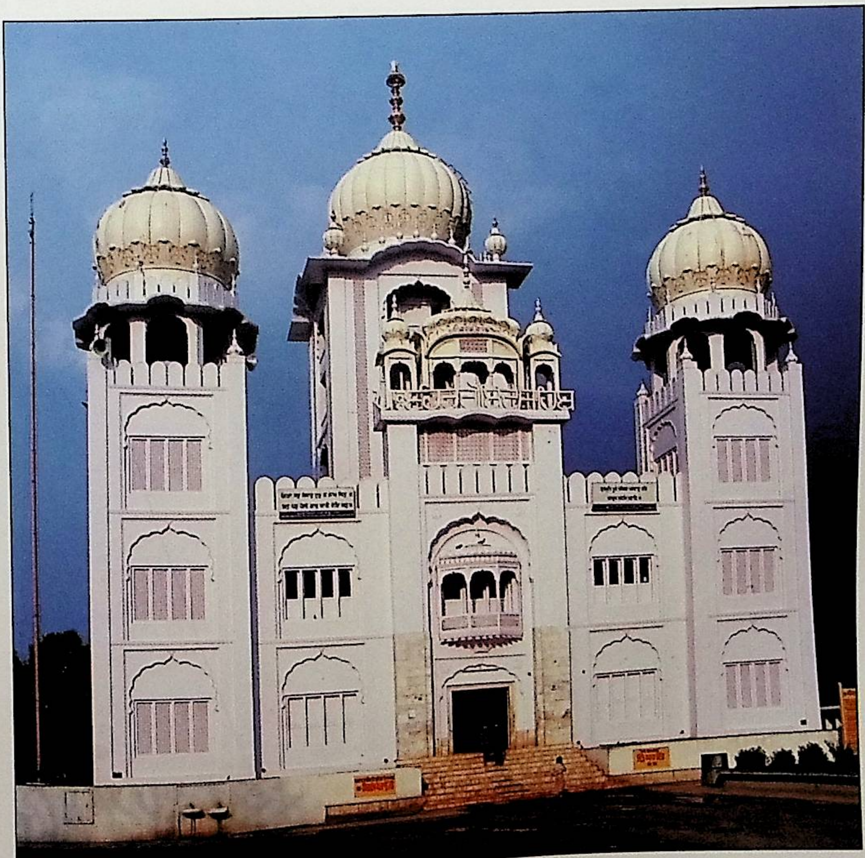
Left top: Gurdwara Sheesh Mahal at Kiratpur emerged as an important centre of Sikh religio-political activities after Guru Hargobind shifted from Amritsar to this place.

Left below: Gurdwara Patalpuri on the banks of river Satluj, near Kiratpur, marks the place where Guru Hargobind breathed his last. The Guru's ashes were immersed in the river Satluj here. Since then it has become customary for the Sikhs to follow the practice.

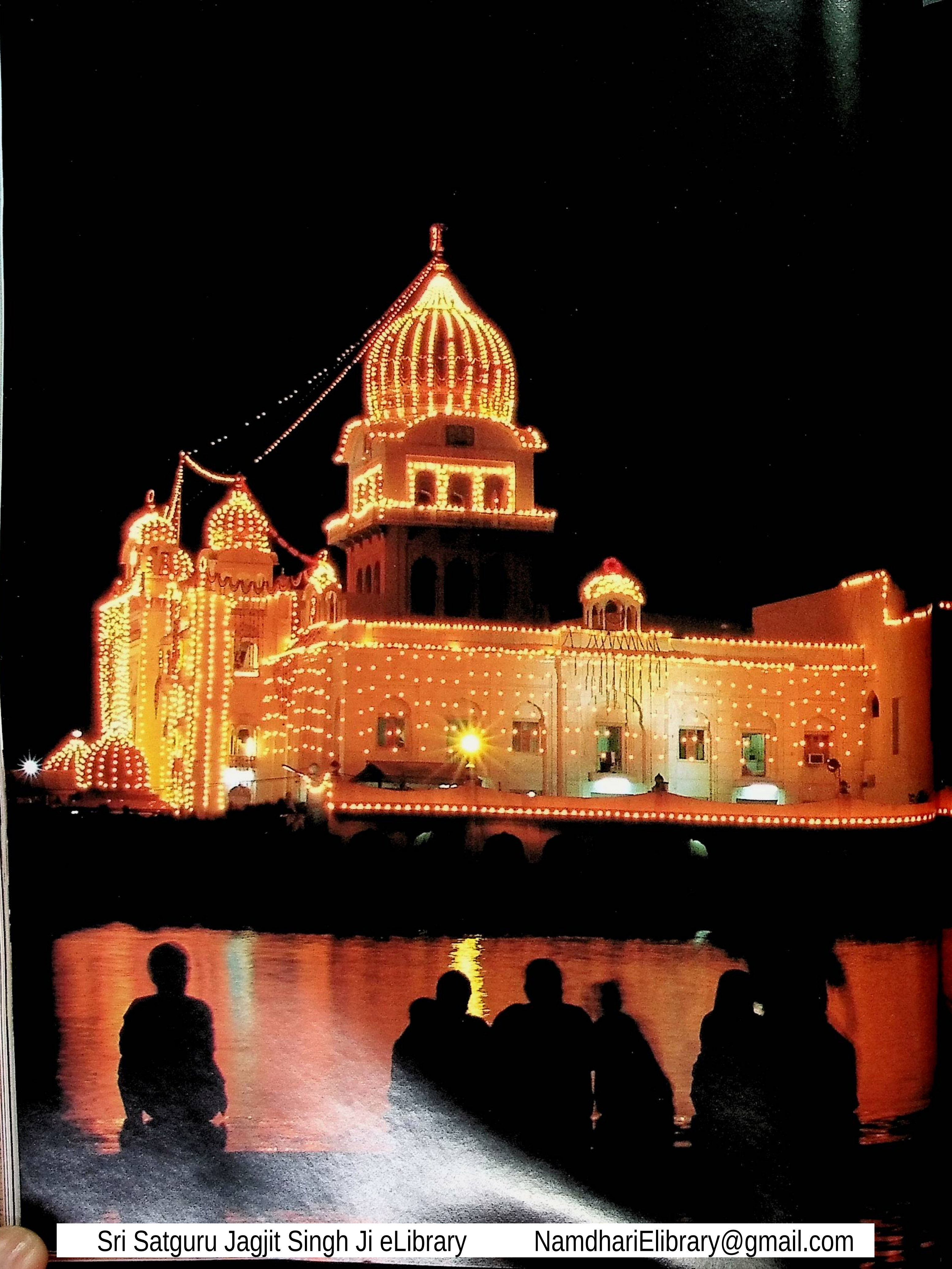
Above: A historic rath *believed to have been used by Mata Ganga during her visit to Baba Buddha*

Below: Historic gurdwara at Kurukshetra built in the memory of third and seventh Gurus' visit to the place

Following double spread: Gurdwara Bangla Sahib in Delhi built in the memory of Guru Harkrishan's stay has become the most popular pilgrimage centre in the capital
Photo: Dushyant Parasher

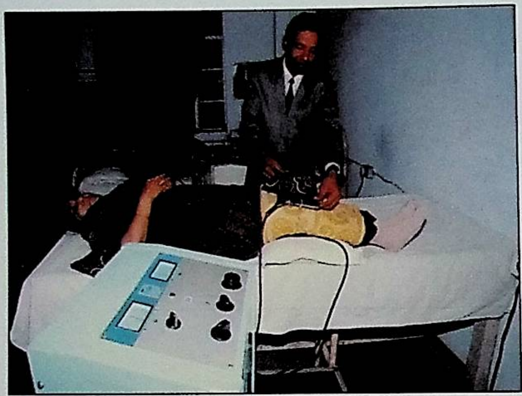








Below: In Delhi, educational institutions, hospitals and dispensaries have been established in the memory of Guru Harkrishan.

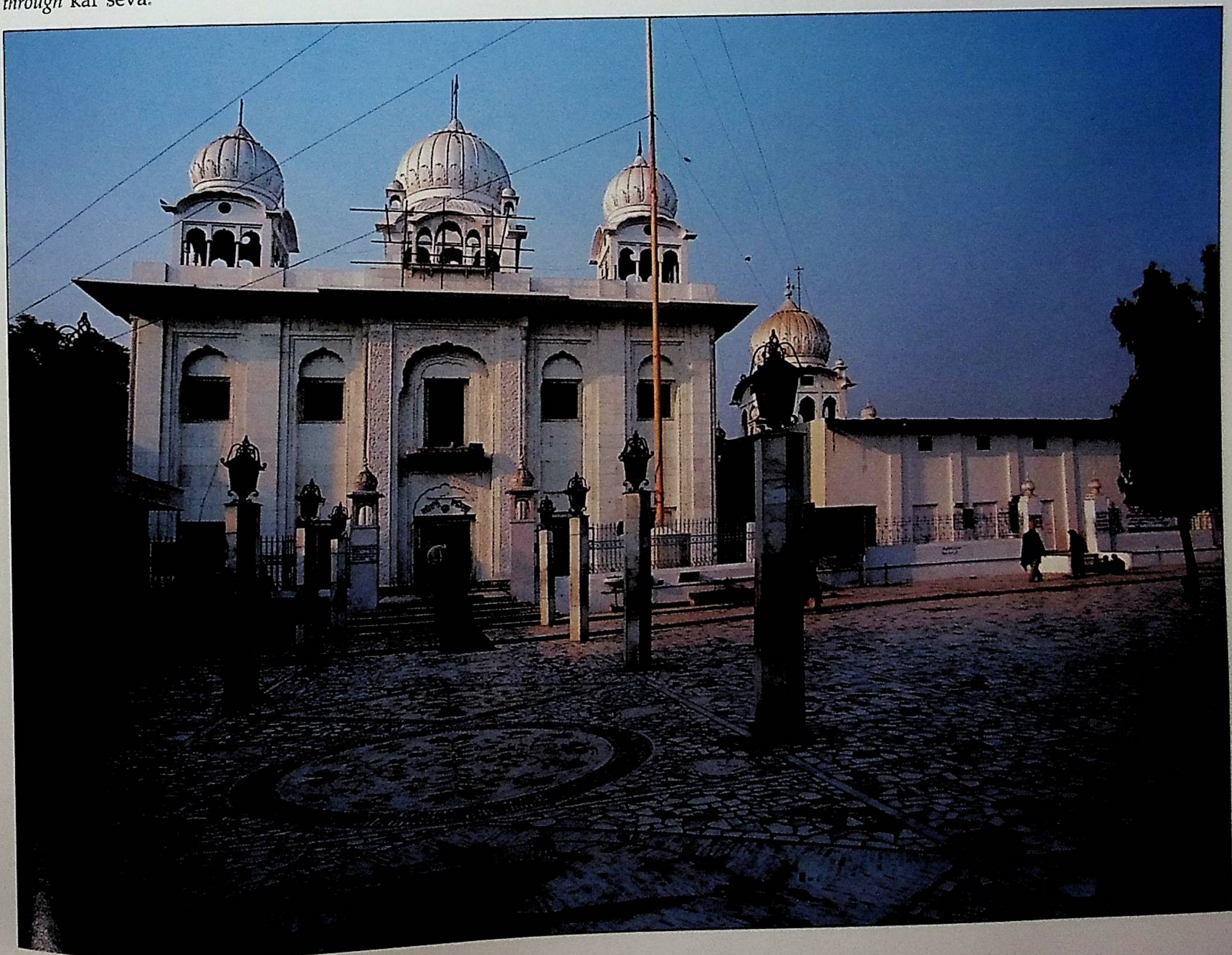


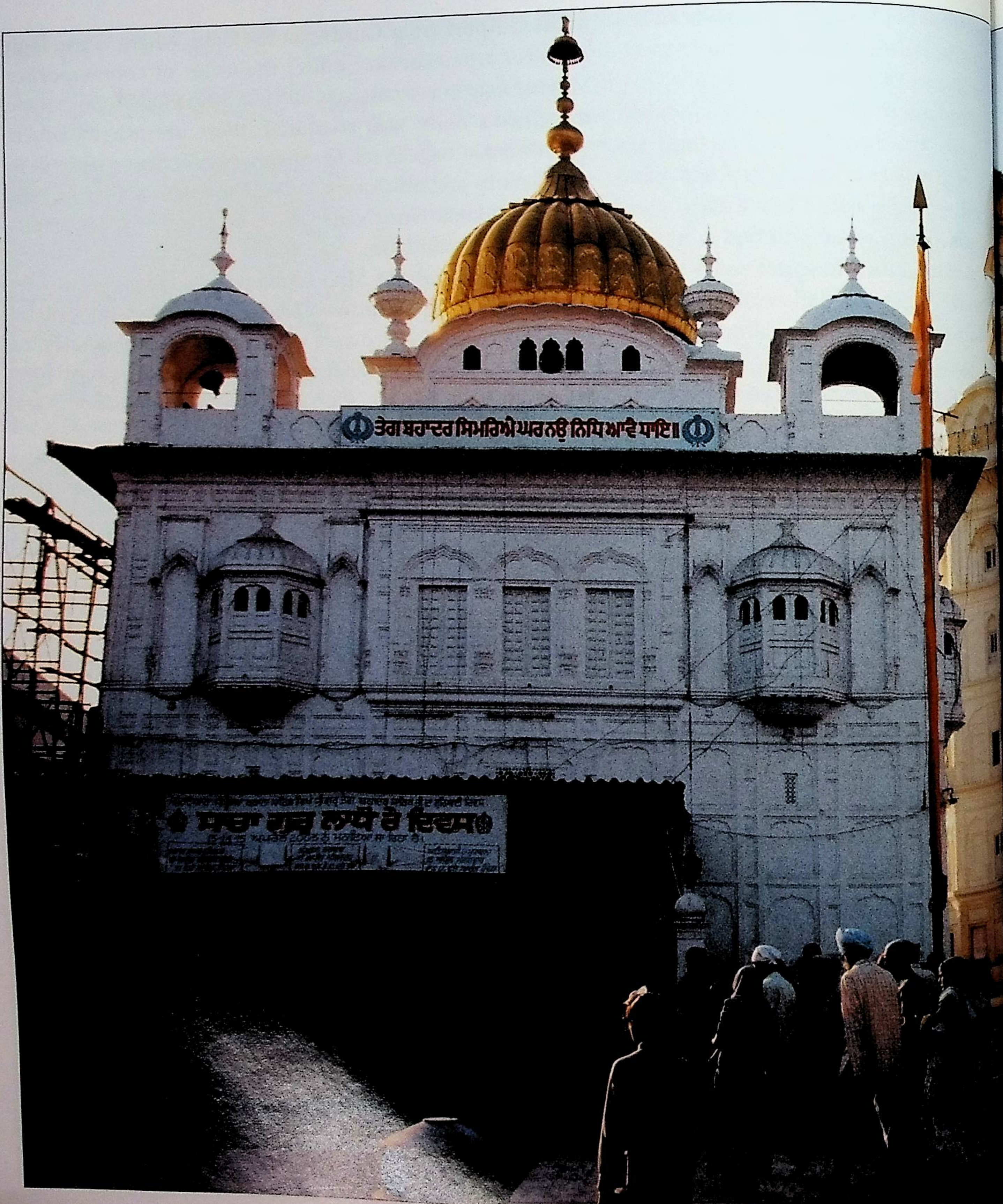
Apart from providing a meeting place to the followers to congregate and sing the Holy Name, gurdwaras also serve various social needs. All gurdwaras are expected to provide the facility of *langar*, free community kitchen, where devotees partake food sitting on the floor in line without any caste restriction or distinction of high and low. Gurdwaras also serve as community centres, schools, clinics and lodging places for pilgrims and wayfarers. Apart from building many gurdwaras in different parts of Panjab and other states of India such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttranchal, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Assam and Bengal, gurdwaras were also built in the Indian capital city of Delhi. Though Sikhs are mainly concentrated in Panjab after the partition of India in 1947, Delhi has the distinction of having the largest population of Sikhs in any city—nearly one



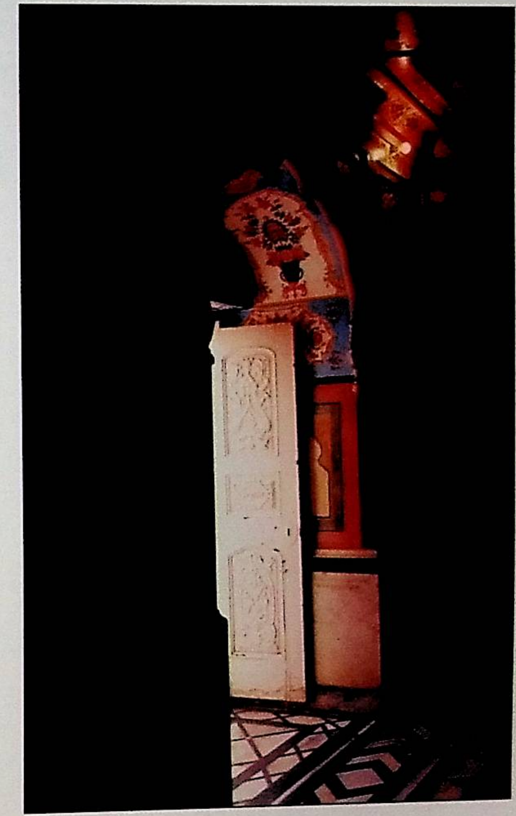
million. Apart from Gurdwara Sis Ganj, where Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed under the order of contemporary Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, and Gurdwara Rakabganj, where the Guru's body was cremated, there are other historic gurdwaras in the capital. Gurdwara Nanak Piao was built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit; Gurdwara Majnu Ka Tilla is associated with Guru Nanak and Guru Hargobind; Gurdwara Bangla Sahib and Bala Sahib are associated with Guru Harkrishan; Gurdwara Moti Bagh and Damdama Sahib with Guru Gobind Singh; Gurdwara Mata Sundri with Guru Gobind Singh's wife, and a gurdwara in Mehrauli commemorates the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur, who liberated Panjab from the Mughals (for details, see *Sikh Shrines in Delhi*, UBSPD and NIPS, 2003).

Below: Gurdwara Bala Sahib marks the place where Guru Harkrishan was cremated. An advance medical centre is being built in the gurdwara compound through kar seva.




ਤੇਗ ਬਹਾਦਰ ਸਿਮਰਿਐ ਘਰ ਨਉ ਨਿਧਿ ਆਵੈ ਧਾਇ॥

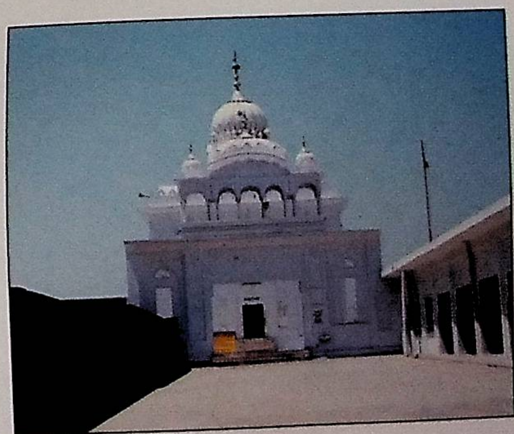




Left: Gurdwara Bhora Sahib at Baba Bakala marks the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur sat in meditation before being heralded as the Guru by Baba Makhan Shah Lubana

Above: Interior of Gurdwara Manji Sahib at Baba Bakala has been decorated with floral designs and events from Sikh history

Below: Gurdwara Guru de Mahal marks the place where foundation of Anandpur Sahib was laid. It was the residence of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh for a number of years.

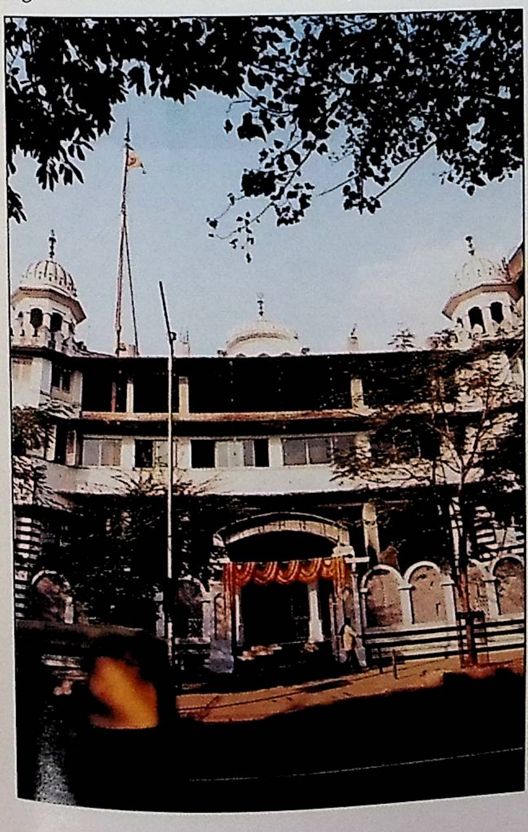


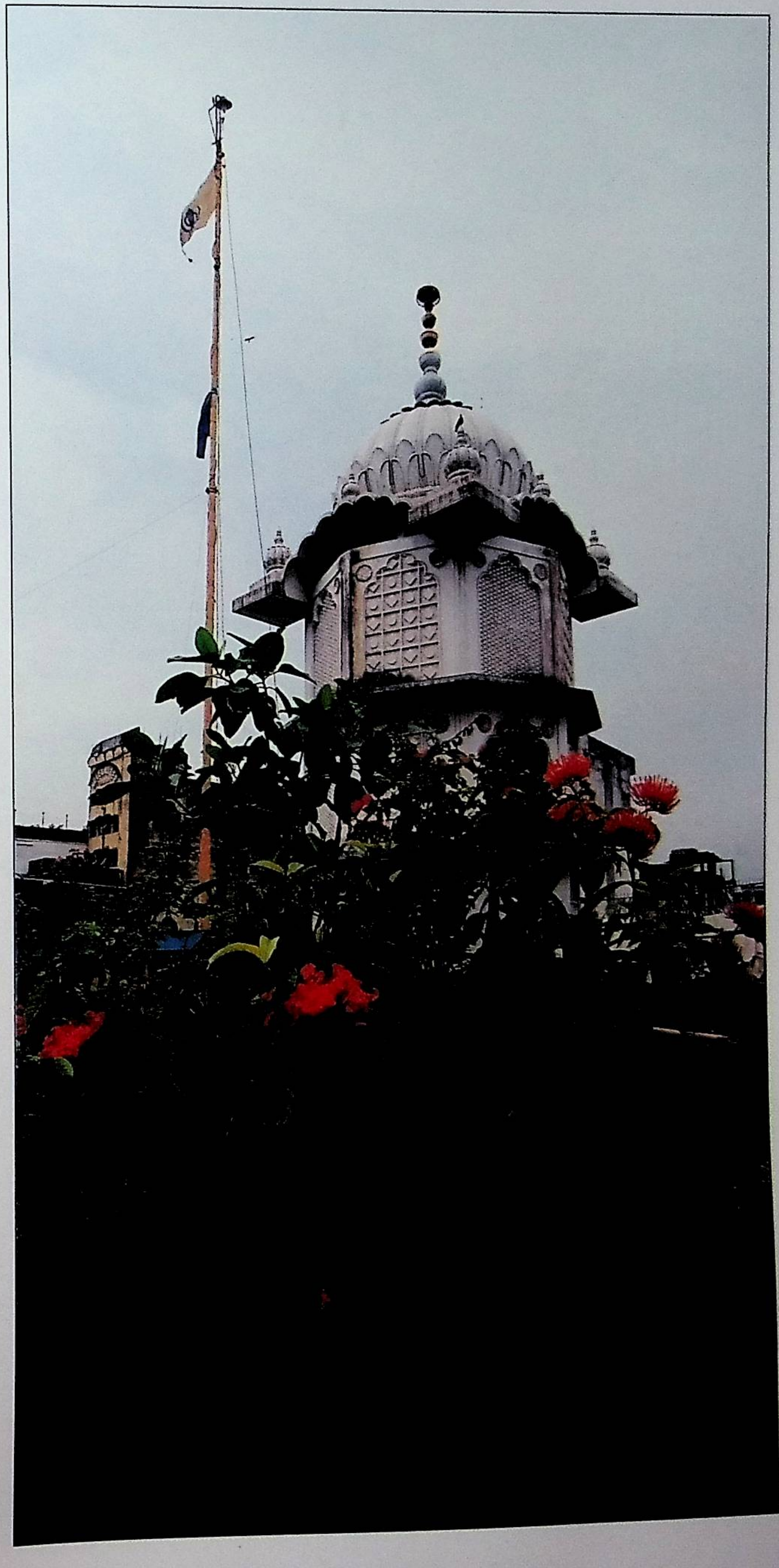


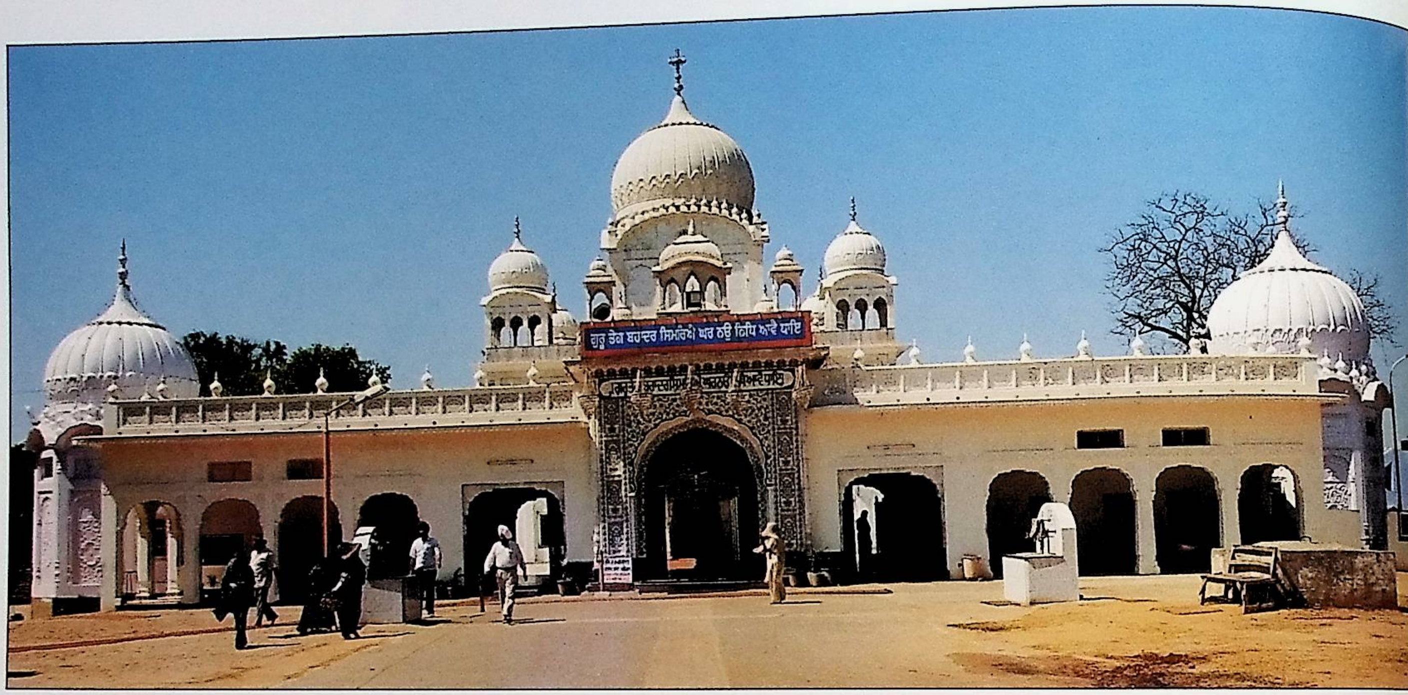
A hukam khas pharman: special injunction, issued by Guru Tegh Bahadur to the sangat *of Patna for their help to the Guru's family on the birth of Gobind Rai*

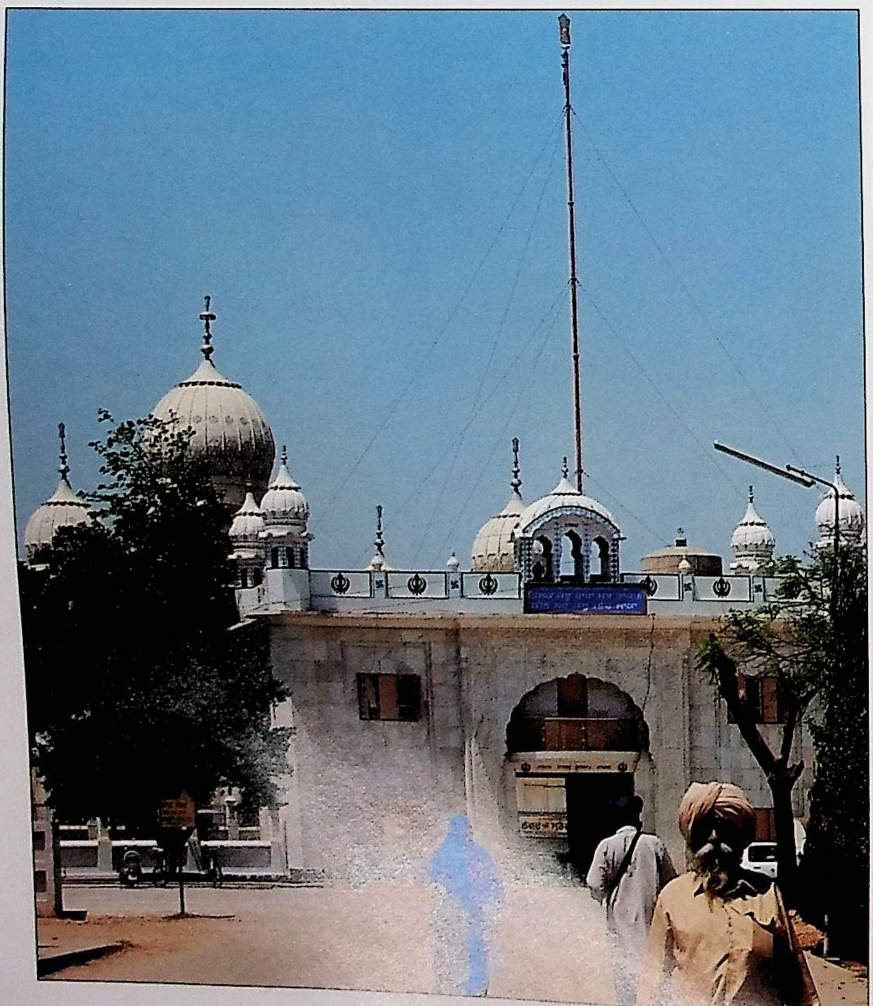
Below: Gurdwara Jagat Sudhar in Kolkata associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit

Right: A Gurdwara in Guwahati, capital of Assam







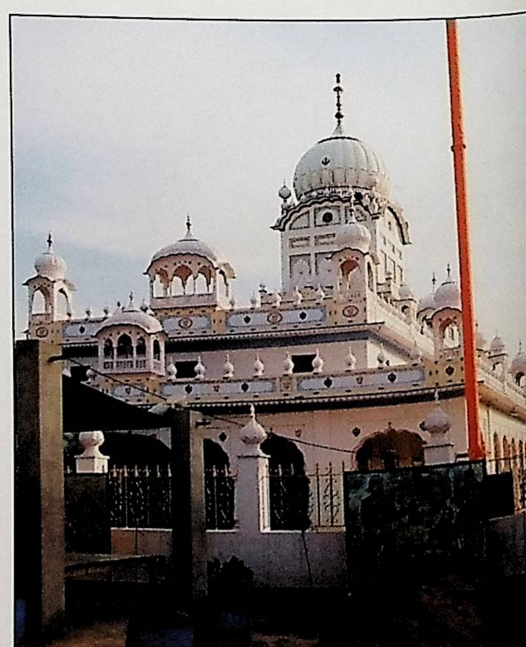


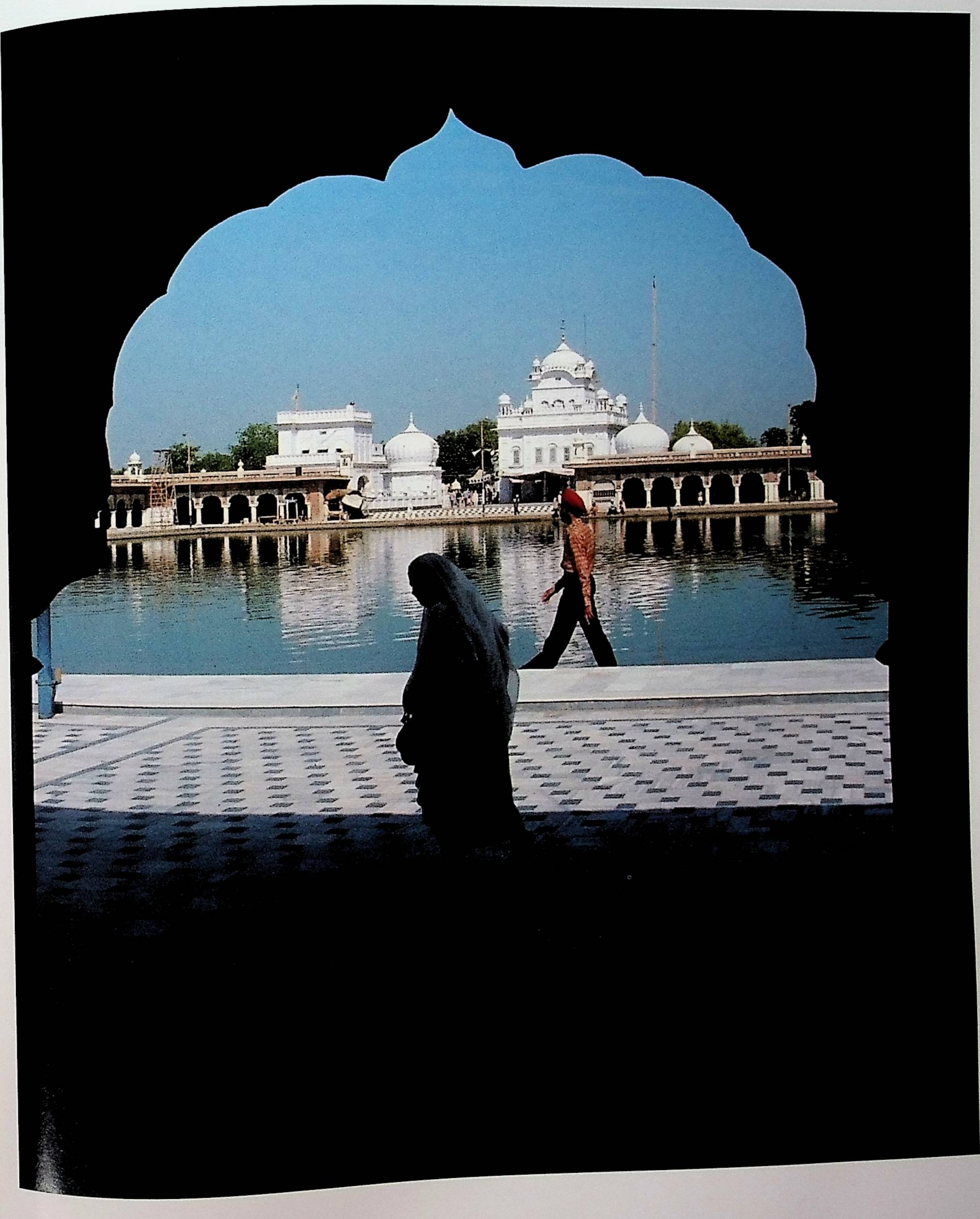
Above: Gurdwara Moti Bagh, Patiala, associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit

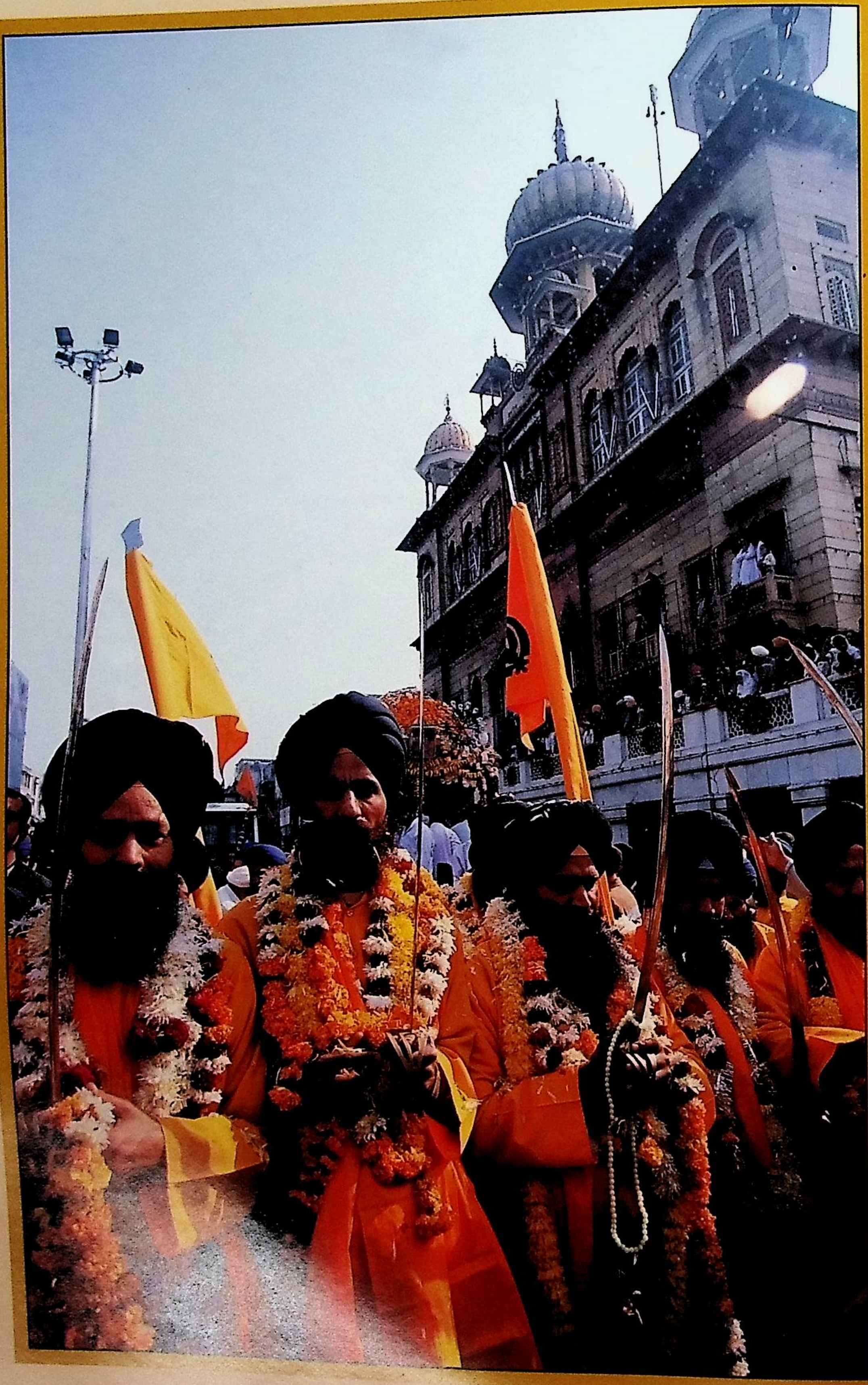
Left: Gurdwara Bahadurgarh marks the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur met the Muslim divine, Saif-ud-din, before proceeding to Delhi

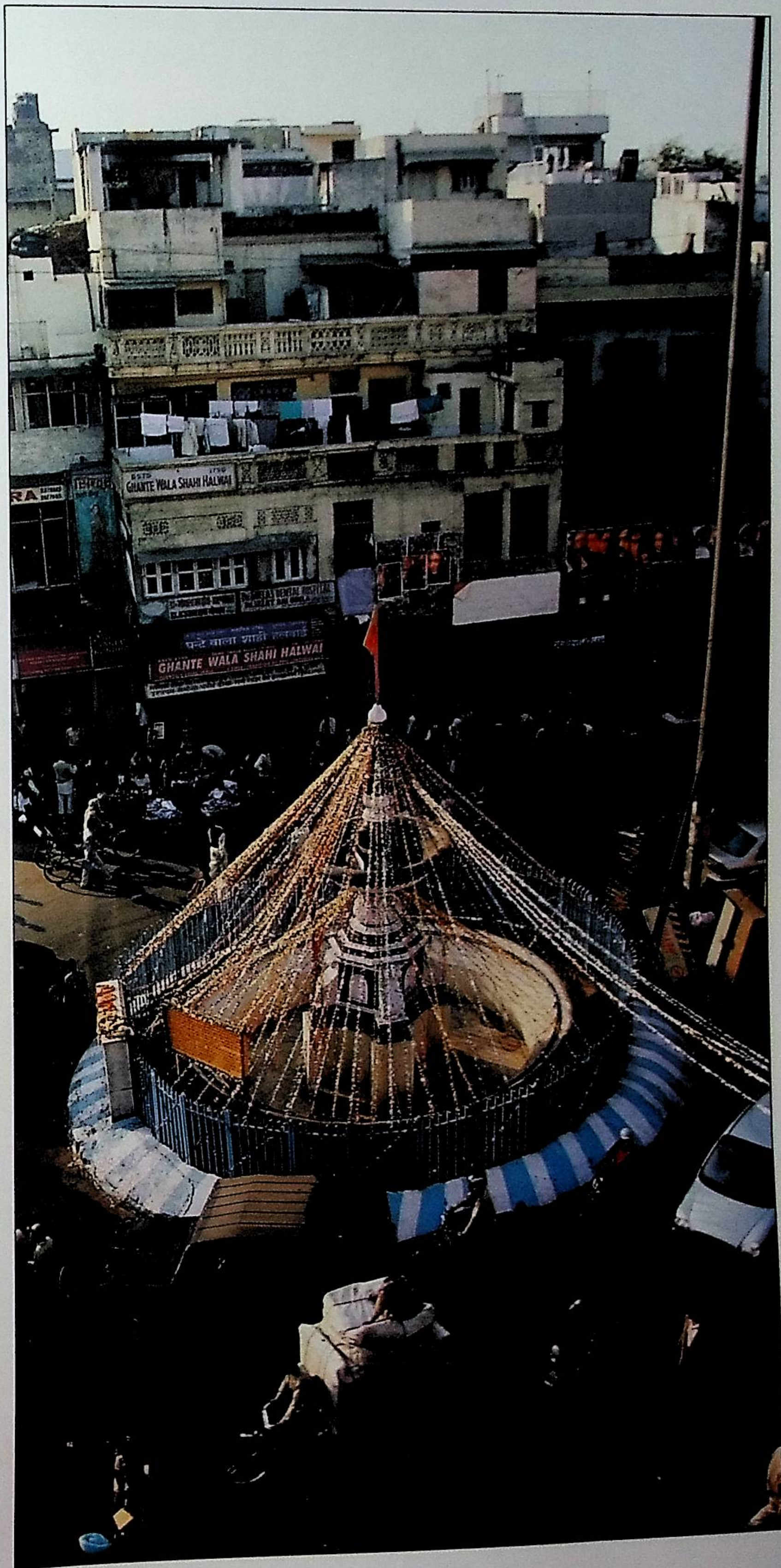
Below: Gurdwara Nauvin Padshahi, Bhawanigarh

Facing page: Gurdwara Dukh Niwaran and its sacred tank
Photo: Dushyant Parasher





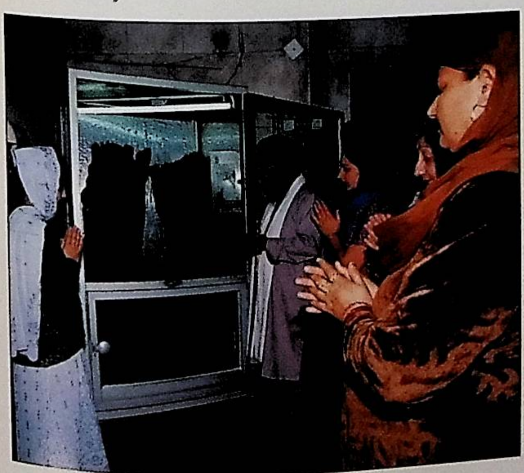


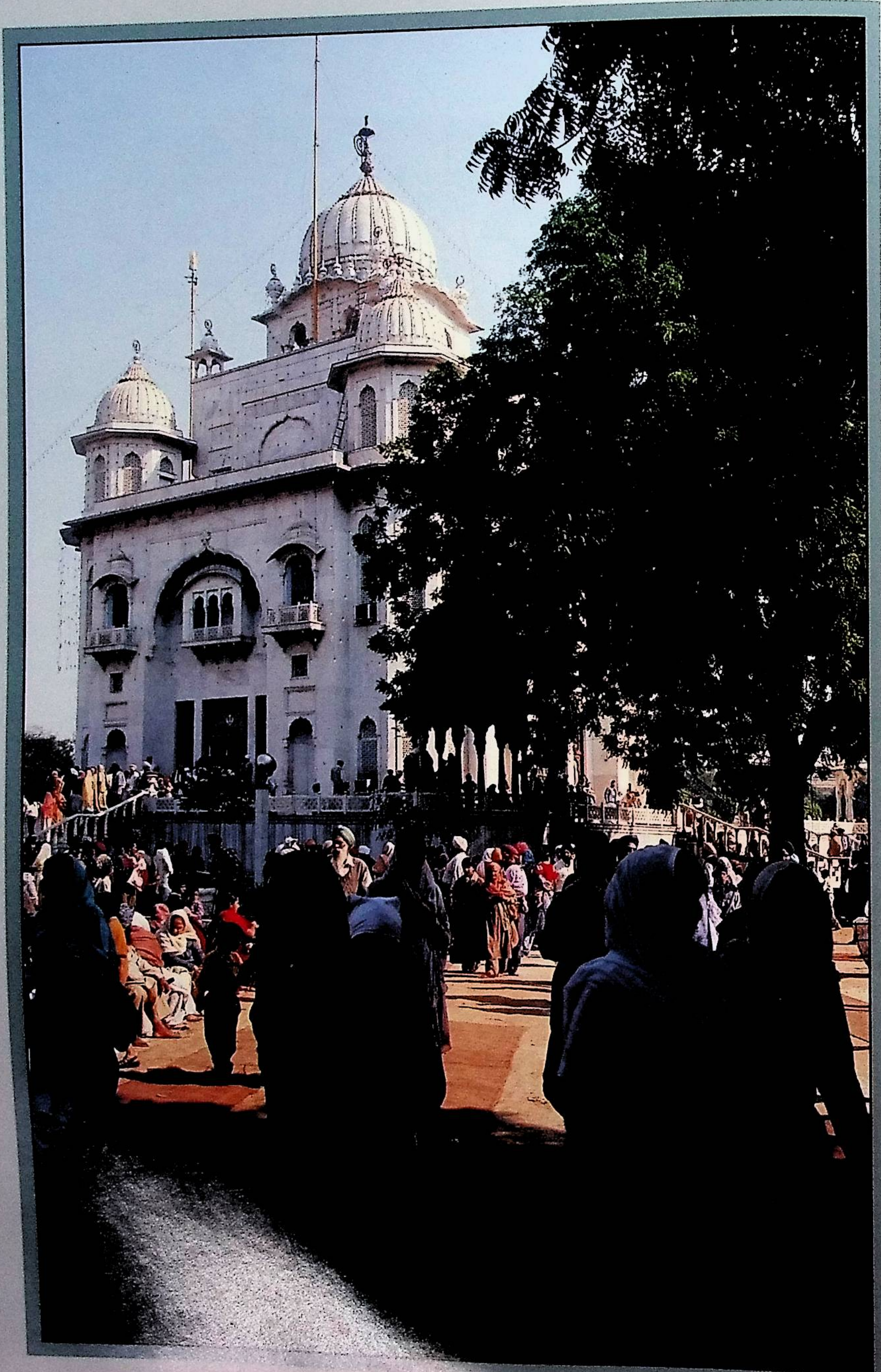


Facing page: Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Chandni Chowk, Delhi, marks the place where the Guru was beheaded and his companions, Bhai Sati Das, Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Dayal Das, tortured to death.

Below: Trunk of the historic banyan tree under which the Guru was executed

Right: Bhai Mati Das Chowk commemorates the martyrdom of Bhai Mati Das.





Management of the Gurdwaras

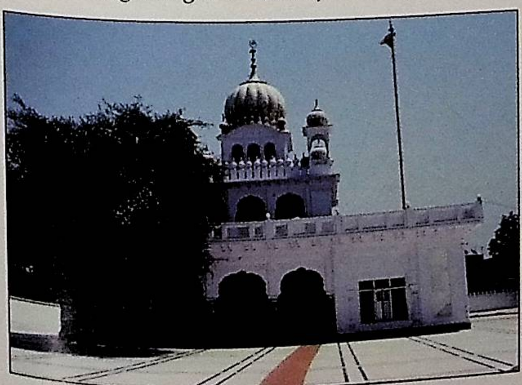
During the time of Guru Nanak, *dharmasals* were established in different parts of Panjab where devout Sikhs collectively managed the affairs of the places in their respective areas. The third Guru, Amar Das, appointed twenty-two *manjis*—diocese—for the propagation of Sikh faith. In keeping with the Sikh tradition of gender equality, *piris*—diocese for women—were also created. In addition to the missionary work, persons in-charge of these centres were also responsible for collection of contributions offered by the devotees and passing them on to the Guru's headquarters for developmental work for the community.

In view of the increasing need for money to carry out the work on the holy tanks and the development of the new town of Amritsar, the fourth Guru, Ram Das, established a new Order of Sikh preachers called *masands.* The *masands* were full-time religious preachers who, in addition to the propagation of the Sikh faith, were also required to collect the subscriptions from the devotees in their respective areas. At the end of the year, on the Baisakhi day, they visited Amritsar to render an account of the offerings received by them and to report on the progress of the propagation work to the Guru.

Facing page: Gurdwara Rakabganj was built by Sardar Baghel Singh at a place where Bhai Lakhi Shah Vanjara cremated Guru Tegh Bahadur's body.

Below: Gurdwara Sis Ganj at Anandpur Sahib marks the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur's head brought from Delhi by a devout Sikh, Bhai Jaita, was cremated with due honour and respect by the Guru's son, Gobind Rai.

Right: Painting depicting the sis of Guru Tegh Bahadur being brought to Anandpur in a palanquin







Gobind Rai (later Guru Gobind Singh) was born in Patna Sahib in 1666. The historic gurdwara of Patna Sahib, which has been declared as takhat, *has relics associated with Guru Gobind Singh.*

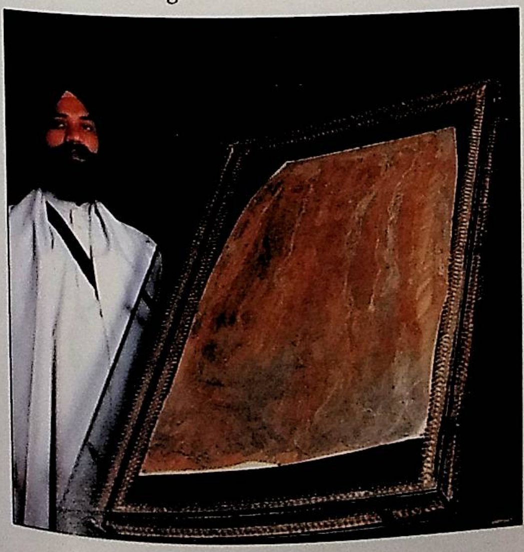
The fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, further elaborated and reorganised this new Order of Masands. He also ordered that in future every Sikh was to set aside *dasvandh*—one-tenth of his income—for communal welfare and remit it through an accredited *masand* who, along with the *sangat* of his area, was to visit and present the collection to the Guru in person on the Baisakhi day. These measures, apart from ensuring a regular flow of offerings for the construction of the city and the temple at Amritsar, also resulted in the emergence of a large number of new *sangats* in the country. From Bhai Gurdas, who inscribed the first copy of *Guru Granth Sahib*, we learn that the number of the Sikhs had been steadily increasing. During the days of Guru Arjan Dev, the Sikhs emerged as a powerful force with a distinct social and moral code of their own.

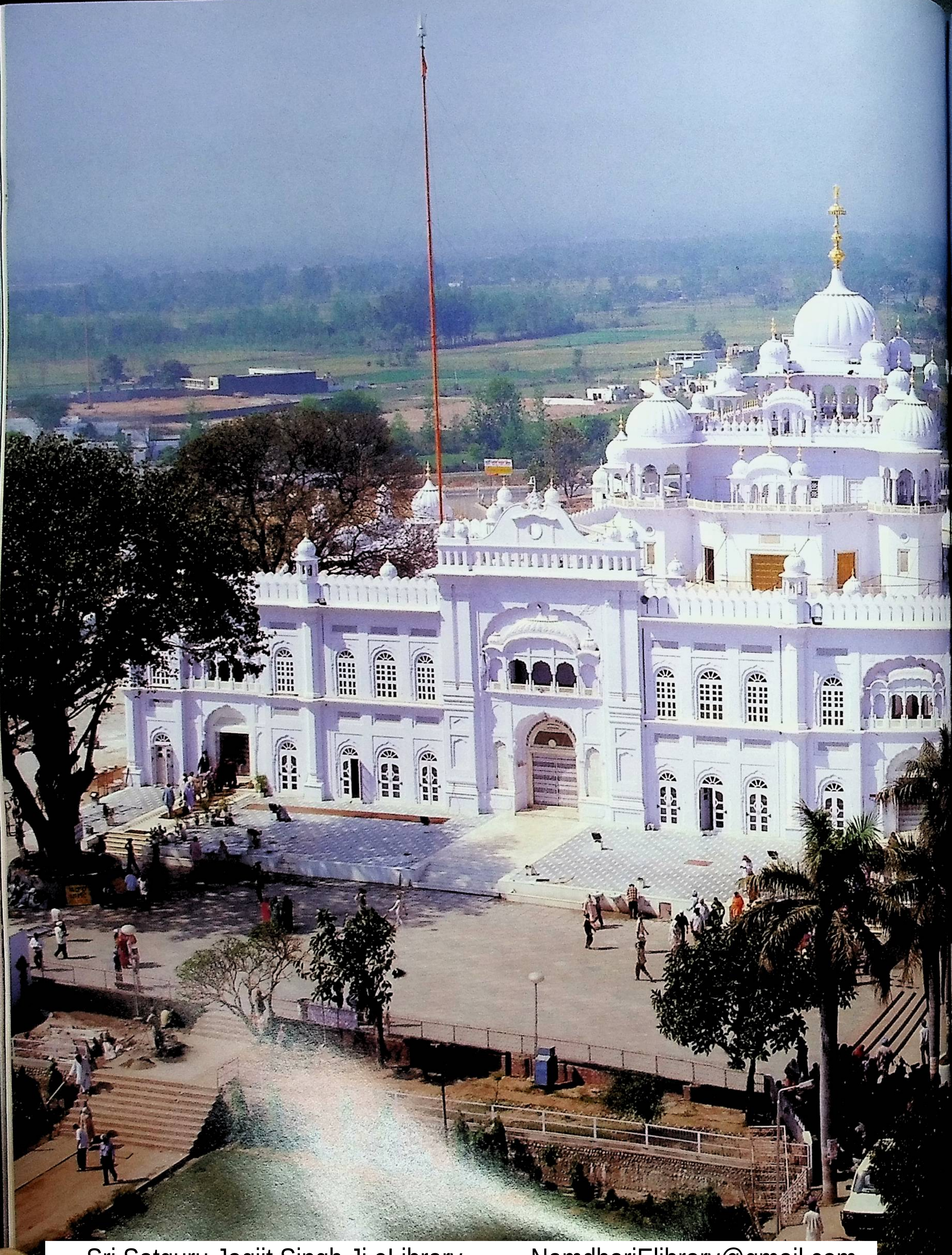
The *masands*, together with the *sangat* of the area, formed the pivot of the Sikh organisation serving the Sikh cause creditably for quite some time. They were chosen for their piety, integrity and high position, and were honorary officers. But during the days of the seventh Guru, Har Rai (1630-61), due to his absence from the main centres of Sikh activity and also due to the hostility of the disappointed claimants to the *gurugaddi*, the *masand* system decayed. During the brief pontificate of Guru Harkrishan (1656-64), the *masands* came out in open support of Ram Rai and other pretenders to the guruship. By the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur's succession, the *masands* had become so audacious as to deny the Guru entry into the Golden Temple at Amritsar. They began to beat and plunder poor Sikhs and threatened all who resented their conduct with the Guru's curse. When the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, found that the *masands*, instead of propagating the Sikh faith and forwarding the collections to the Guru—the purpose for which their Order was created—were misusing the offerings, he abolished their Order.

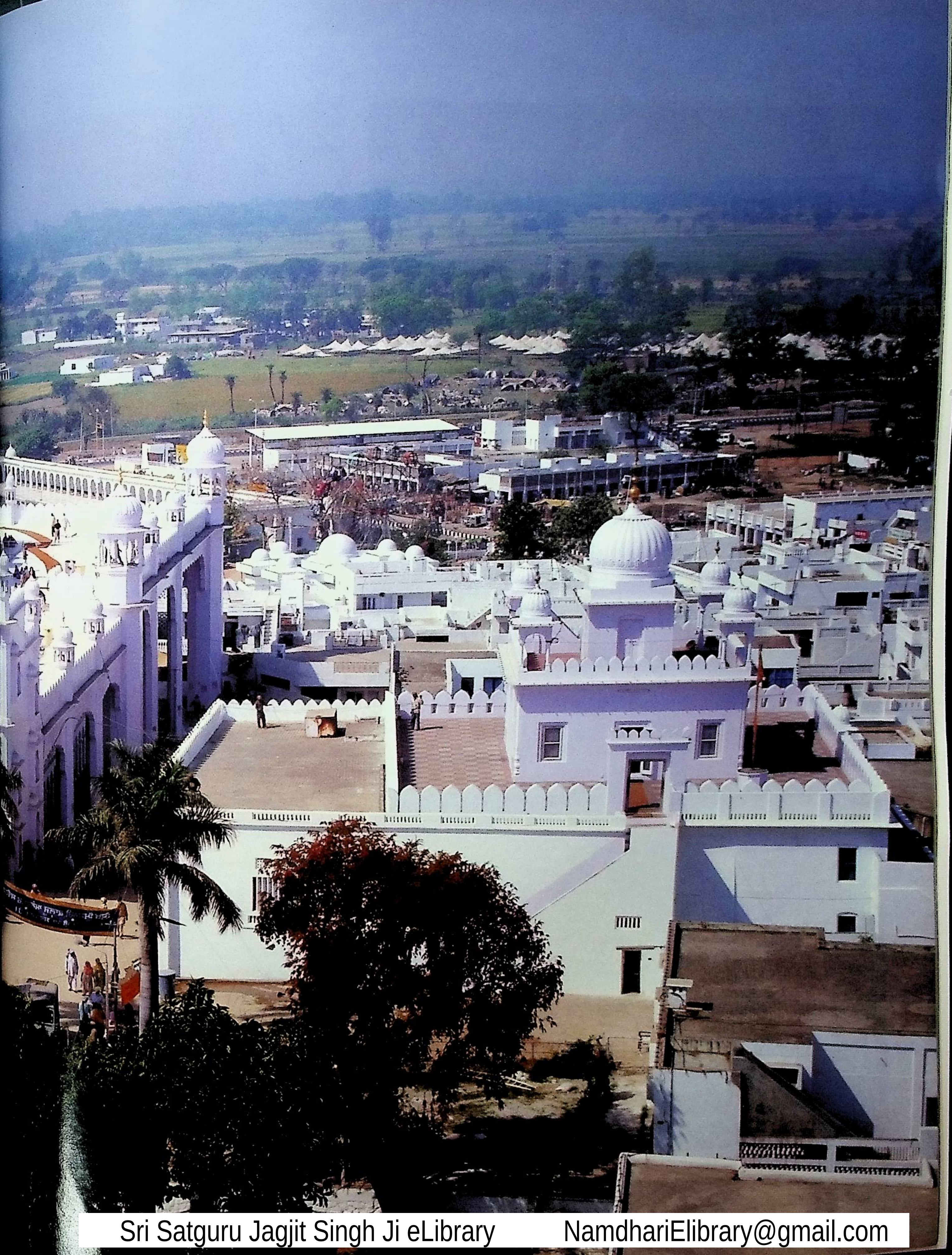
In accordance with the Sikh tradition, in the earlier days the priests or others in charge of various *sangats* or *dharamsals* did not look upon the offerings as their personal property. Instead, they utilised them for the purpose of running free kitchens and other similar works of community welfare. Sikh tradition mentions that some of the priests, such as Bhai Lakha Singh, Bhagat Singh and Suba Singh, even refused personal *jagirs* offered to them by various Sikh chiefs.

Below: Chola *of Gobind Rai preserved in Takhat Patna Sahib*

Following double spread: Anandpur, the city founded by Guru Tegh Bahadur, emerged as the centre of Sikh activities during Guru Gobind Singh's time. It was here that Guru Gobind Singh organised his army, built many forts and fought and won many battles against the hill chiefs and Mughal governors
Photo: Hardev Singh









Left: Anandgarh Fort, Anandpur

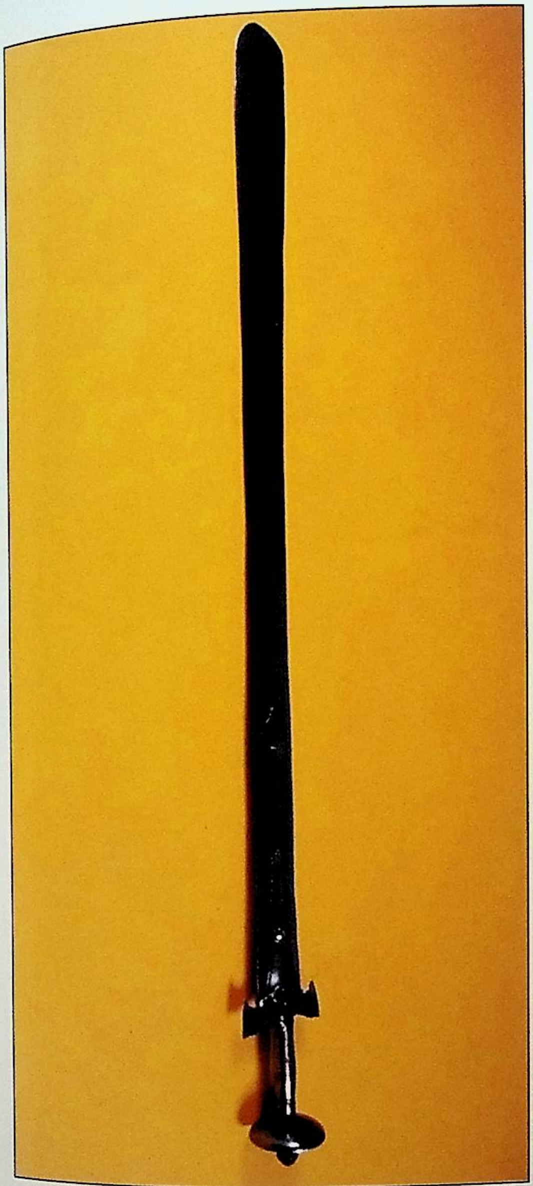
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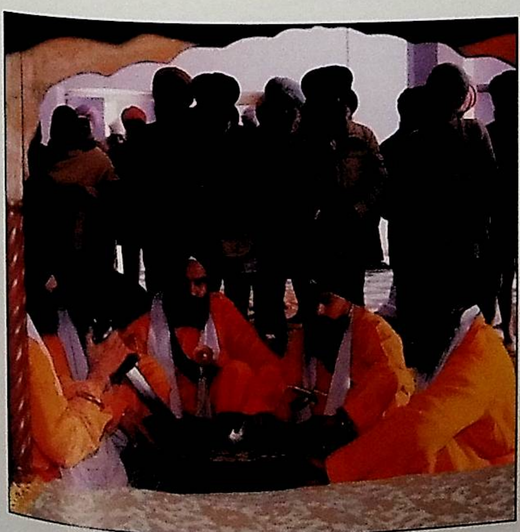
Left top: The historic khanda *associated with the* amrit *ceremony of* AD *1699*

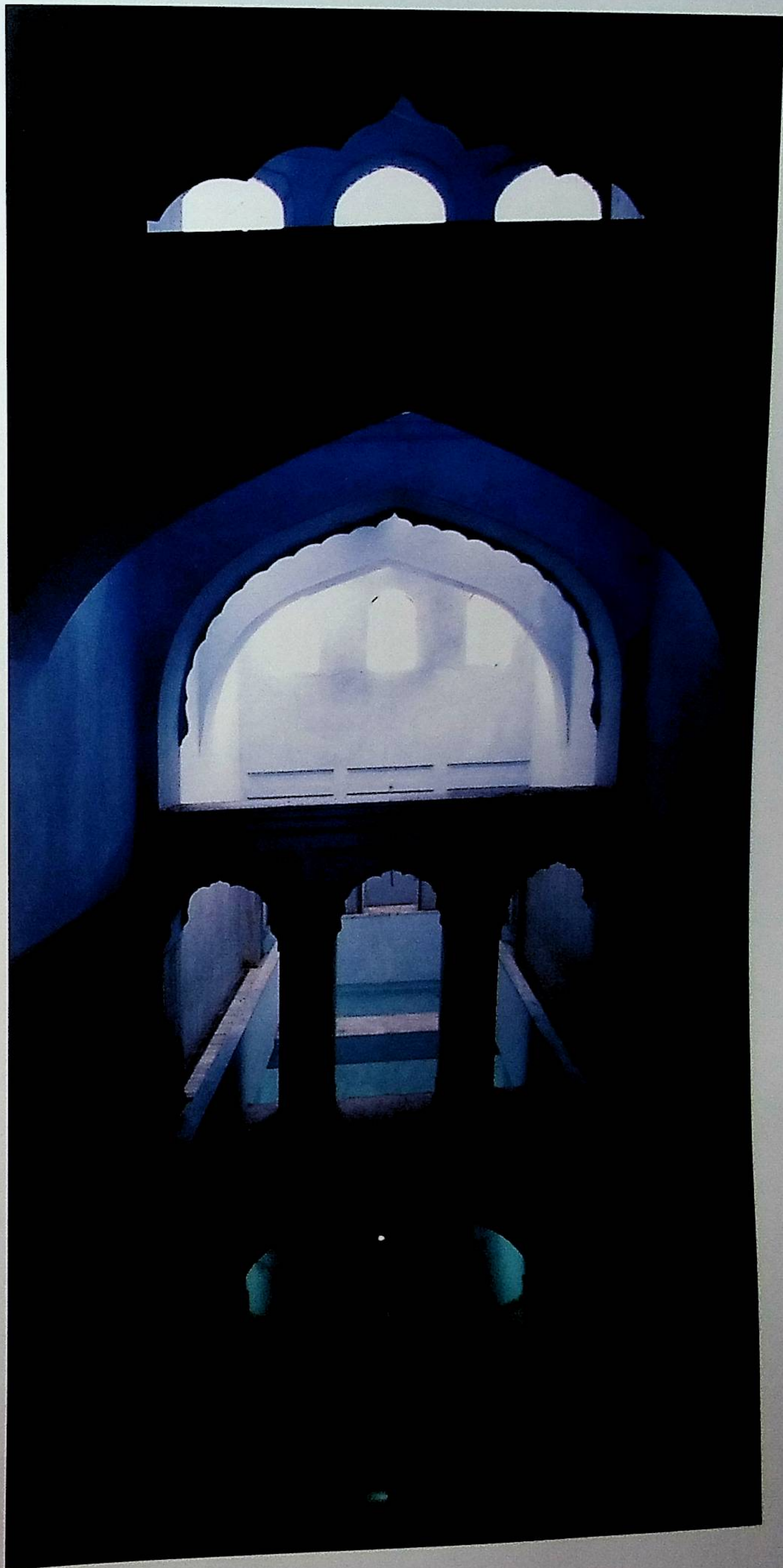
Left below: Amrit *being prepared by the* Panj Piaras *in Takhat Keshgarh Sahib*

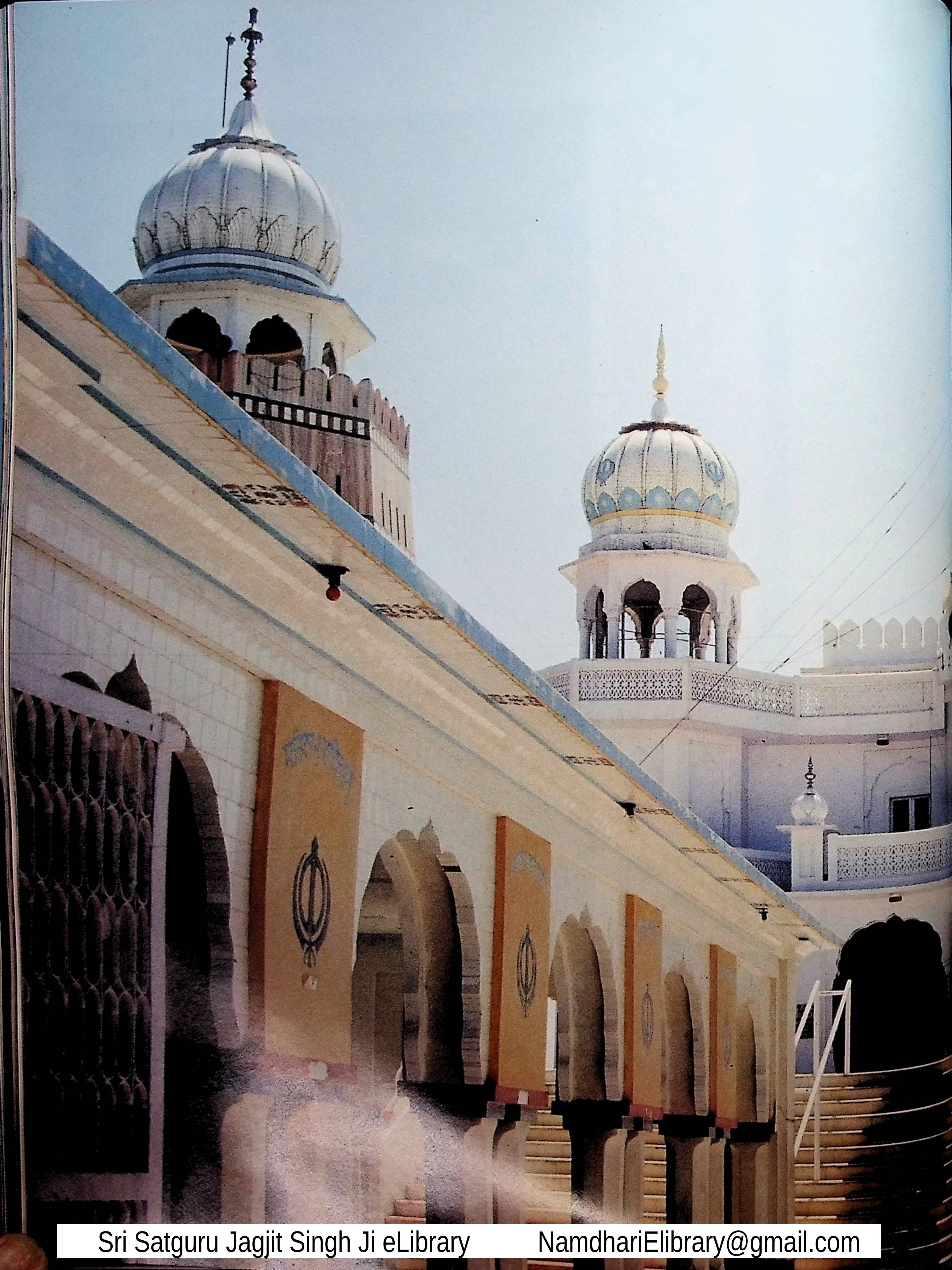
Right: The historic baoli *in Anandgarh Fort*

Following double spread: Talwandi Sabo, near Bathinda, was developed by Guru Gobind Singh as a centre of higher learning. It has since been declared as a takhat *by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.*

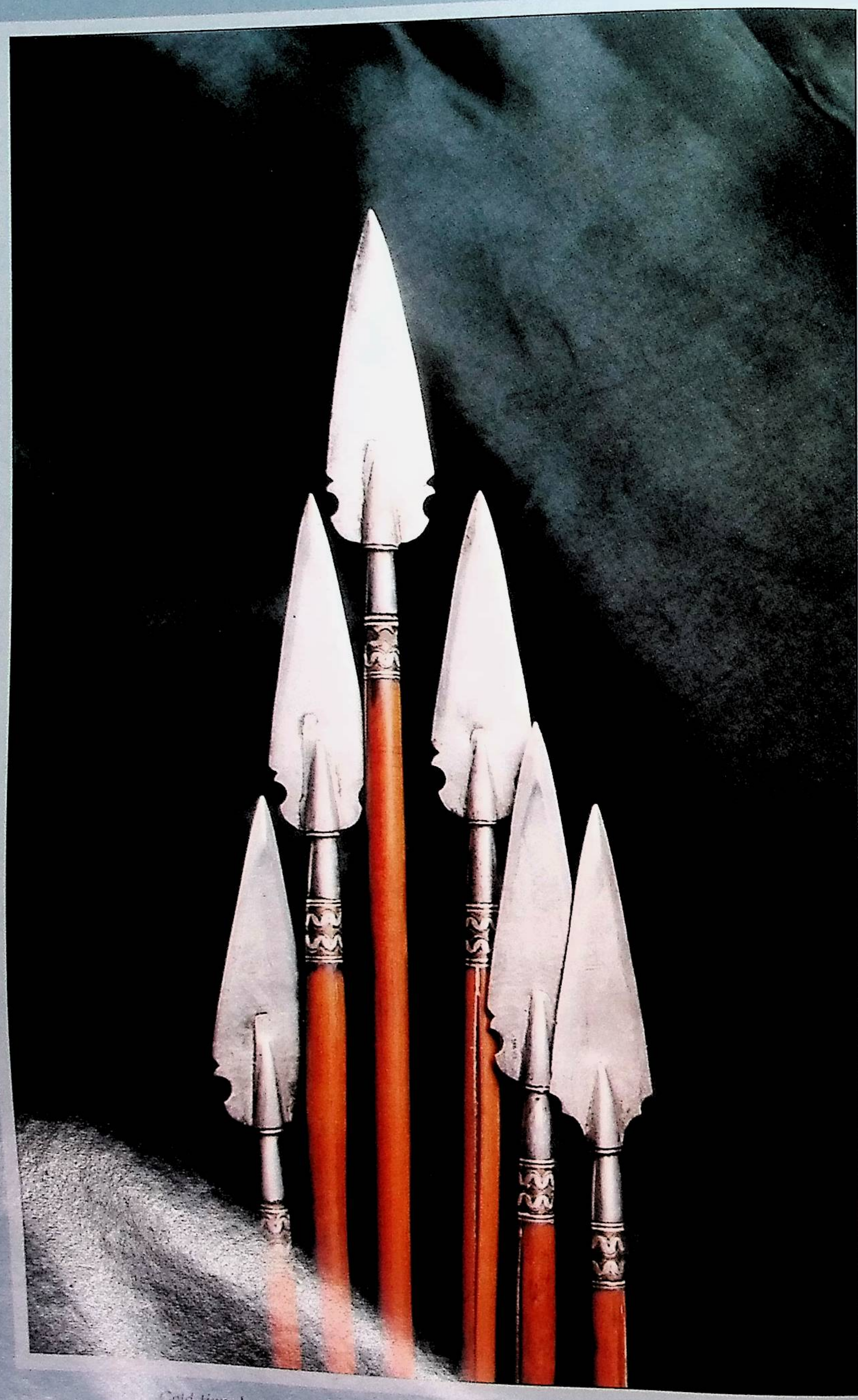




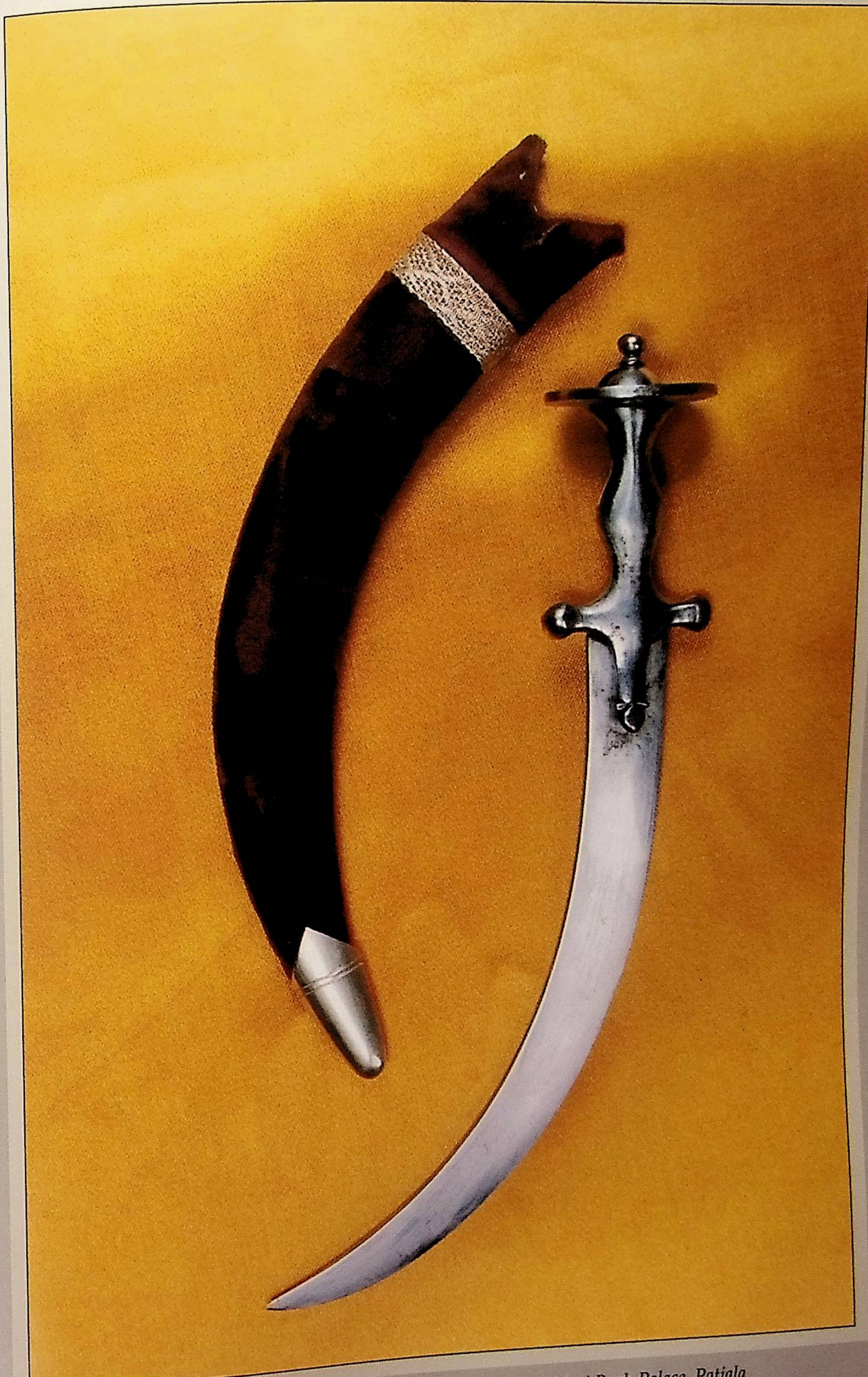





SAHIB



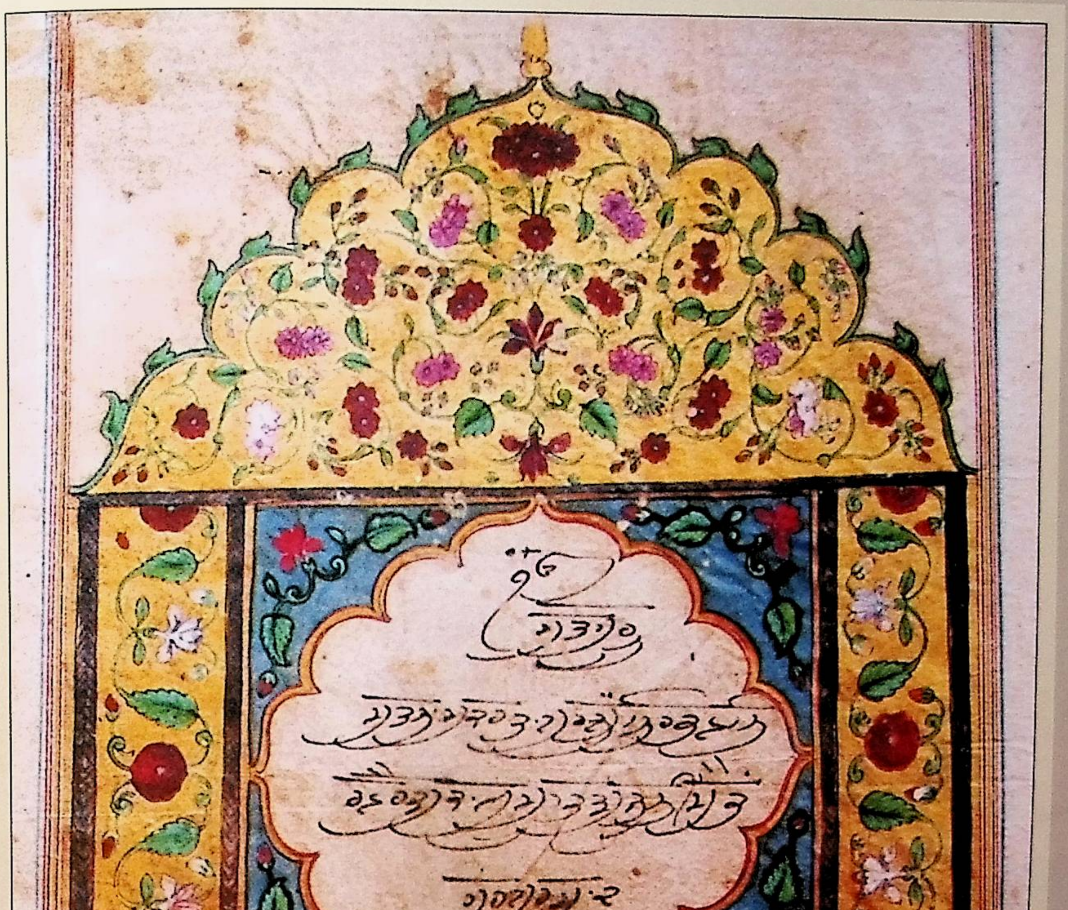
Gold-tipped arrows of Guru Gobind Singh, [illegible] Moti Bagh Palace, Patiala



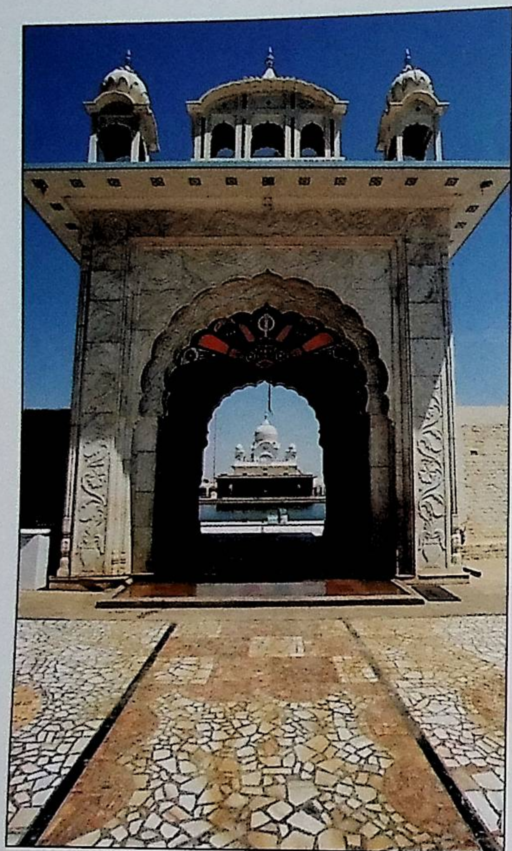
Personal katar (sword) of Guru Gobind Singh, New Moti Bagh Palace, Patiala



A rare sword of Guru Gobind Singh seen on display in Otago Museum, Dunedin, New Zealand



Nisan *of Guru Gobind Singh in a rare manuscript at Takhat Patna Sahib*



Left top: Gurdwara Gangsar, Patshahi Dasvin, Jaito

Left below: Gurdwara Haji Rattan, Bathinda

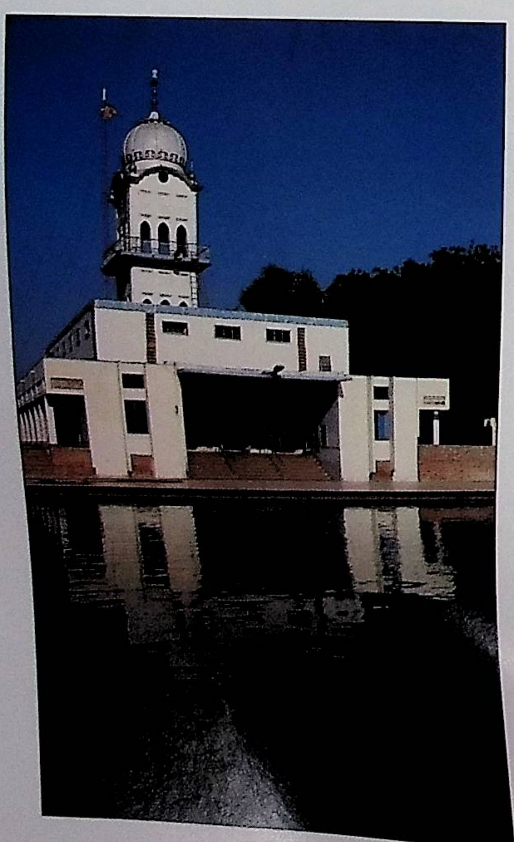
Below: Gurdwara Tenth Guru, Kurukshetra

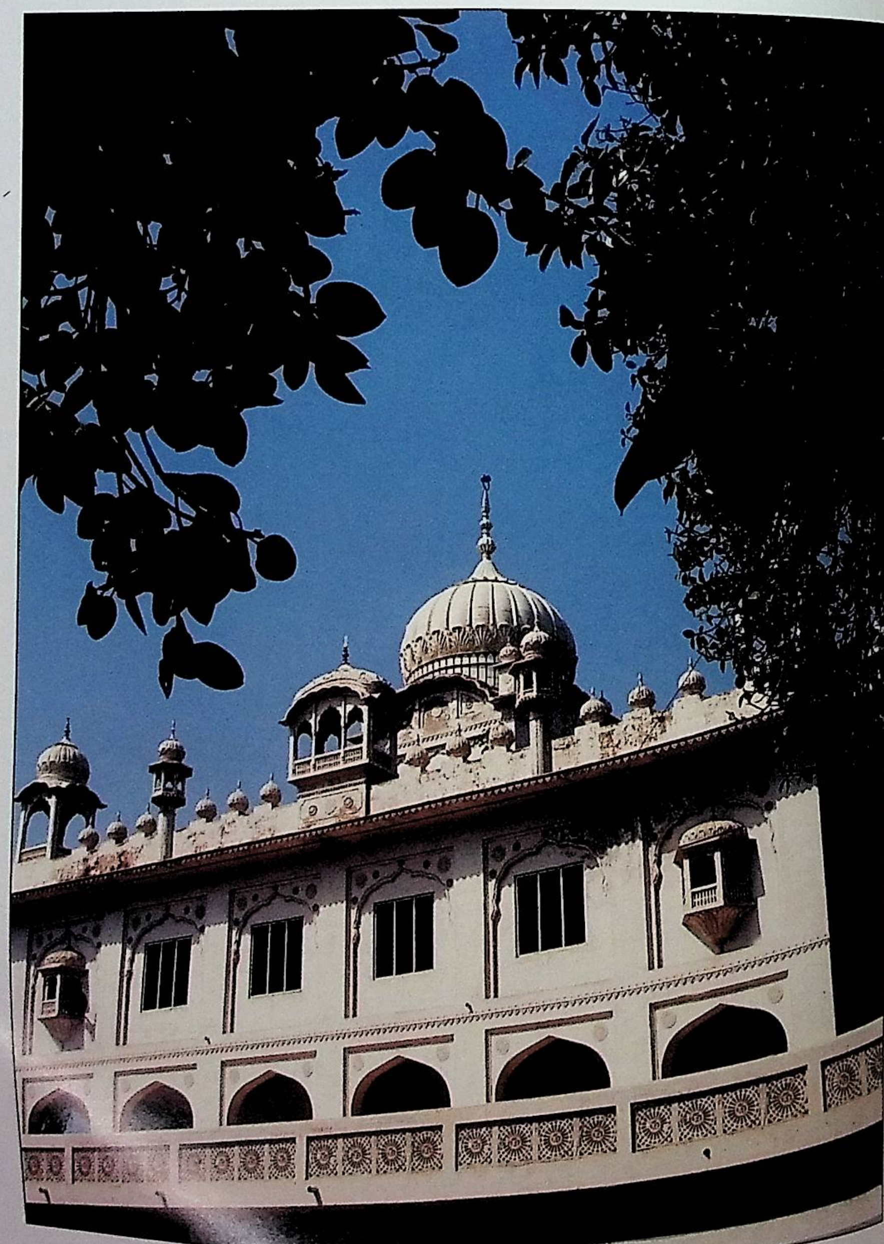
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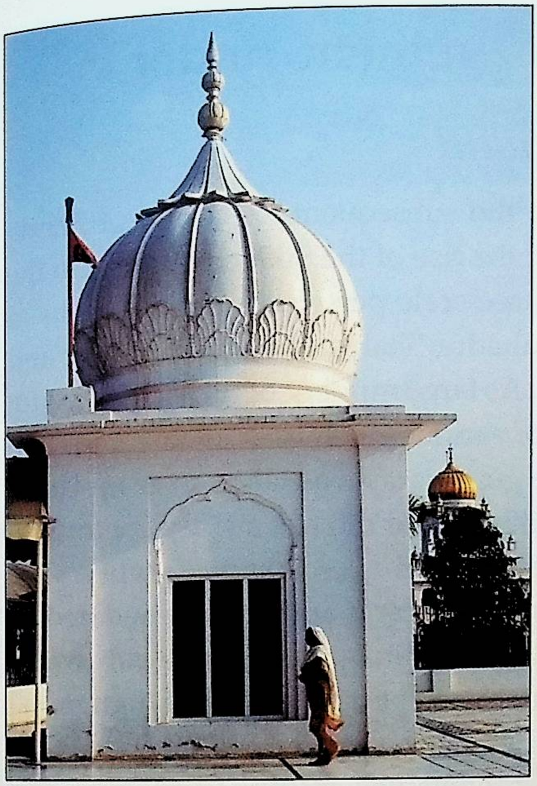
Top left: Gurdwara Shahid Ganj, Fatehgarh. It is said that the Sikhs once rescued 40 cartloads of heads of persecuted Sikhs—around six thousand—which had been collected at Lahore for presentation to the Emperor in Delhi, and were cremated at this spot in AD*1710.*

Top right: Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib where Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh were bricked alive after they refused to convert to Islam

Below: Jor Mela *at Fatehgarh Sahib organised in the loving memory of the two young* sahibzadas *of Guru Gobind Singh*











Gurdwara Management under Hereditary *Mahants*

After the arrest and the subsequent execution of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716 till the rise of the Sikh chiefs later in the century, there occurred large-scale persecution of the Sikhs at the hands of Emperors Bahadur Shah and Farrukh Siyyar and their governors in Panjab. As large number of Sikhs, along with Sikh preachers in-charge of various gurdwaras, were forced into exile, management of the gurdwaras was taken over by Udasi *mahants* who professed Sikhism but did not strictly conform to its outward symbols and could thus escape persecution. The Udasis in charge of various gurdwaras at this time rendered an important service to the Sikh religion by keeping the gurdwaras functioning. They were highly respected as men of high moral character and integrity. They were also well-versed in the Sikh scriptures and devoted themselves chiefly to reciting and expounding the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

Most of the Udasis were not attached to any particular shrine or to its wealth and property but moved from place to place. There were, however, some who established institutions, admitted followers and became heads of their gurdwaras. They came to be known as *mahants*—literally agents or deputies. In the earlier stages, these *mahants* enjoyed the confidence and reverence of the *sangat* of their areas and followed the advice and warning of Guru Nanak not to covet the offerings made by the devotees. The *mahants* also nominated their successors to the *gaddis* or hereditary offices. Their nominees were accepted by the *sangat* as both the *mahants* and their *chelas* enjoyed popular esteem and confidence. But this tradition of purity and austerity seems to have deteriorated as a result of the increase in their income, derived from revenue-free *jagirs* bestowed on most of the historic shrines by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other Sikh chiefs in Panjab. With rapid increase in their wealth and influence because of political patronage, the *mahants* began converting the gurdwara property into their personal fiefdom. It was not very surprising, therefore, to find some of the leading *mahants* drifting to a new lifestyle of luxury and dissipation verging on depravity.

To check the growing mismanagement of the gurdwaras the Sikhs organised themselves into *jathas*, or groups, of reformers in their respective areas. To meet the challenge of the party of reform, some of the leading *mahants* and the government-appointed *sarbrah*, i.e. manager, of the Golden Temple tried to enlist the support of the British officials in Panjab. It was with this intent that the priests of the Golden Temple described the *Ghadrite* heroes as *thugs* and called upon the devotees not to lend any support to their efforts to create an armed rebellion in India. After the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh in which many innocent Indians were killed as a result of General Dyer ordering firing on the peaceful crowd, while the country was busy condemning his action, Arur Singh, the government-appointed *sarbrah* of Golden Temple, invited the General to the temple and honoured him with a *saropa* (robe of honour).

While the tragedy of Jallianwala lent an impetus to the struggle for India's freedom, the perfidious and sacrilegious action of Arur Singh brought home to the advocates of gurdwara reform the urgency of putting a stop to the prevailing system of management, and with it the greed, licentiousness and misdeeds of the *mahants*, priests and other vested interests among them. Among various factors contributing to the growing discontent among the Sikh community, the fact of gross misuse of their premier shrine at Amritsar at the hands of the government-nominated *sarbrah* proved to be the proverbial last straw on the camel's back and set the stage for the Akali struggle for gurdwara reform.

To begin with, the agitation for gurdwara reform was initiated by the local Akali *jathas* in their respective areas. Shortly thereafter two representative bodies of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and the Shiromani Akali Dal, came into existence. In the course of their five-year struggle—from 1920 to 1925—these two bodies were not only able to gain control over all the important Sikh shrines through peaceful means, but also strengthened forces of nationalism in Panjab by ejecting the *mahants*, the government-appointed managers and other vested interests in the Sikh shrines. (For details, see *The Akali Movement*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1978.)

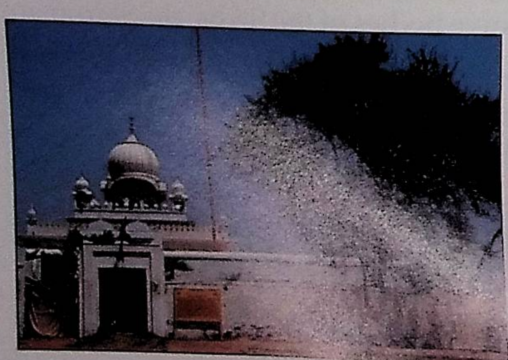


Above: *A gathering of Akali activists in front of Hall Gate, Amritsar*

Below: *Gurdwara Angitha Sahib, Jaito, where Akali reformers killed in Jaito were cremated*

Far below: *Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib, Jaito*





Through their passive sufferings the Akali reformers compelled the British authorities in Panjab to pass the Sikh Gurdwara Bill in the Panjab Legislative Assembly in July 1925, which gave the Sikhs the right to democratically elect persons to control and manage the historic gurdwaras in Panjab. As per terms of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925, a Central Board—Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee—was formed for the management of the historic gurdwaras in Panjab, which numbered 241 as per Schedule 5 of the Act. Under the provisions of the Act, various committees were formed for the management of gurdwaras with the Central Board superintending the overall management. Procedure for the election of members of the Board was defined. To settle disputes, a Gurdwara Tribunal was also set up. While the SGPC continues to manage the historic gurdwaras in Panjab, there are historic gurdwaras outside Panjab which are being managed by independent bodies. For the management of historic gurdwaras in Delhi, the Indian Parliament passed an Act in 1971 setting up Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee. For Takhat Patna Sahib and Takhat Hazoor Sahib there are separate bodies of management. Management of the gurdwaras in Pakistan after partition of the country was being looked after by the Wakaf Board till the establishment of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) recently. In addition to historic gurdwaras, there are a large number of gurdwaras in India and almost all countries of the world where there are Sikhs, which are generally controlled by the Singh Sabhas, duly registered charitable bodies, under the laws of the respective countries.

With the partition of India in 1947, the Sikh community suffered the most—not only in terms of loss of life and property but also in terms of their being deprived of free access to some of their historically most important gurdwaras which were located in the part of the country that became Pakistan. Gurdwara Janam Asthan in Nankana where Guru Nanak was born as well as other gurdwaras associated with early life of the Guru, as also Kartarpur where the Guru breathed his last, are in Pakistan and hence inaccessible to the Sikhs who migrated to Indian side of Panjab. While a few fortunate Sikhs can visit the gurdwaras in Pakistan as part of the *jathas* on Guru Nanak's

birthday, for majority of the Sikhs glimpse of their historic gurdwaras in Pakistan remains a distant dream.

Some Historic Gurdwaras

Apart from the gurdwaras connected with the birth of the Gurus, martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, sons of Guru Gobind Singh and other Sikh heroes, there are a number of other gurdwaras throughout India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Bangladesh built to commemorate the Gurus' visits to these places. The largest number of historical gurdwaras are connected with Guru Nanak.

Apart from Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana, there are other gurdwaras in Pakistan connected with various events of the life of the Guru—such as Gurdwara Bal Lila, the village playground where Nanak played with his childhood friends; Gurdwara Patti Sahib, where the Guru had his initial schooling; Gurdwara Kiara Sahib, where the Guru grazed his cattle; Gurdwara Tambu Sahib, the place where the Guru tried to hide himself under a *van* tree which looked like a *tambu* (tent) and Gurdwara Manji Sahib where the Guru used to rest under the shade of a tree. Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal was built to commemorate the Guru's encounter with Wali Kandhari, a Muslim divine, who threw a piece of rock to hit the Guru on learning that Mardana, a Muslim, was following a non-Muslim. According to Sikh tradition, the Guru stopped this piece of rock with his palm (*panja*) leaving an imprint, which has become object of worship by the devout.

There are other gurdwaras such as Chaki Sahib and Rori Sahib at Eminabad, Gurdwara Kir Bawa Sahib at Jai Sukh, Gurdwara Choa Sahib, Rohtas, Chhota Nankana at Alpa and Manga, Lahore, a gurdwara and a *sarovar* at Barki, gurdwaras at Dialpur, Okara and Harapa, Gurdwara Bairi Sahib and Gurdwara Baoli Sahib at Sialkot and Gurdwara Kartarpur on the banks of river Ravi. (For details, see *Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan*. pp. 15-25)

In the Indian Panjab there are large number of historic gurdwaras connected with Guru Nanak. On the banks of rivulet Kali Bein in Sultanpur Lodhi, there are three gurdwaras—Gurdwara Tap Asthan, Gurdwara Sant Ghat and Gurdwara Ber



Above: Gurdwara Sangat Tola, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Below: Situated at the height of 3,700 metres above the sea level, Gurdwara Pathar Sahib was built in the memory of Guru Nanak, who is believed to have halted here on his return from Tibet Mansarover.

Sahib. There are other gurdwaras in Sultanpur Lodhi such as Hatt Sahib, the site of *Modi Khana*—the grain store where the Guru worked as its keeper—Gurdwara Antaryamta Sahib where the Guru joined in the *namaz* with the local *nawab* and Gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh, where the Guru lived along with his family. In the town of Batala, District Gurdaspur, Gurdwara Kandh Sahib commemorates the events connected with the marriage of Guru Nanak. There are gurdwaras in the states of Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pardesh, Uttranchal, Madhya Pardesh, Assam and Bengal as also in Delhi associated with Guru Nanak.

There is a gurdwara associated with Guru Nanak's visit in the campus of the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. It is believed that a gurdwara was also built in Baghdad after the Guru's brief halt at the place on his return from Mecca. According to the *Janam Sakhi* tradition, Guru Nanak even visited the neighbouring country of Sri Lanka where he had a dialogue with the local ruler, Raja Shiv Naubh, who became a devotee of the Guru.

There are gurdwaras in Khadur Sahib associated with the Second Guru, Angad Dev. Gurdwara Chaubara Sahib in Goindwal and Gurdwara San Sahib in Basarke are associated with the third Guru, Amar Das. The fourth Guru, Ram Das, founded Chak Ram Das, which came to be known as Amritsar, because of the sacred tank. In the centre of the pool, Guru Arjan built the Darbar Sahib, the famous Golden Temple, the foundation of which was laid by a Muslim divine, Mian Mir. Guru Arjan Dev's son and successor; Guru Hargobind, built the famous Akal Takhat in the Golden Temple complex, which has emerged as the central seat of Sikh temporal authority. The Guru also started the tradition of *Miri-Piri*, combining temporal and spiritual authority, by wearing two swords—one of *Miri* and the other of *Piri*. These two swords are displayed at the Akal Takhat along with fifty other weapons associated with various Gurus and Sikh heroes. Guru Hargobind came into conflict with the Mughal authorities and fought various battles in the Malwa area. There are many gurdwaras commemorating the Guru's victories in these battles. The Guru was interned in the Royal Fort at Gwalior but was subsequently released along



with fifty-two *rajas* who took protection under him. This event is celebrated by the Sikhs by illuminating their central shrine, the Golden Temple, on the eve of the Diwali every year. Gurdwara Patal Puri, Kiratpur, in District Ropar is associated with Guru Har Rai who popularised herbal medicines and set up a hospital for the purpose.

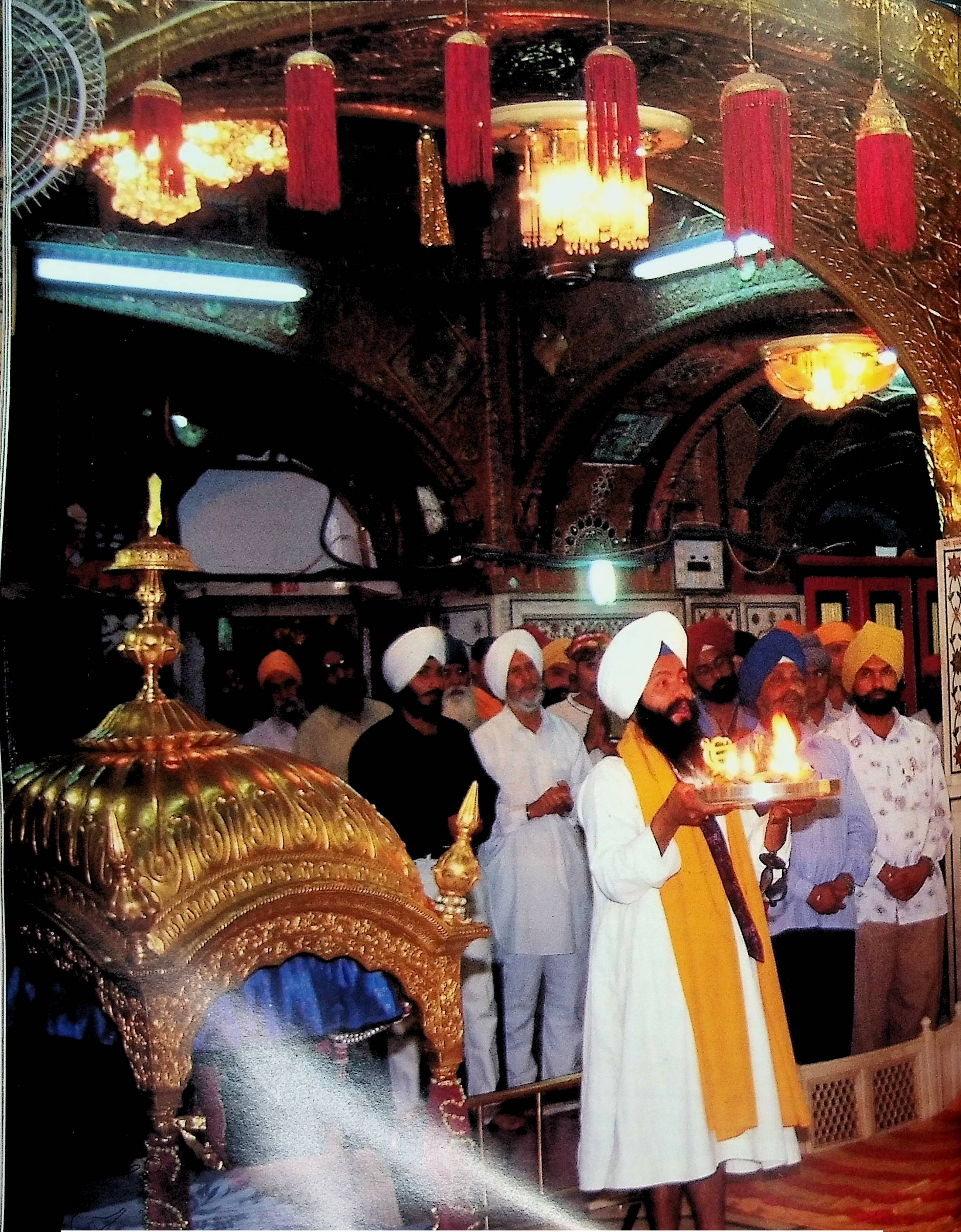
The Ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, was born in Amritsar where now stands Gurdwara Guru-ka-Mahal. A devout Sikh, Makhan Shah Lubana, heralded the Guru at a place called Baba Bakala. The Guru travelled to different parts of India, including Bihar, Assam and Bengal. At Patna Sahib in Bihar his wife, Mata Gujri, gave birth to Gobind Rai in 1666 who succeeded him. Patna Sahib is now one of the five *takhats* of the Sikhs. There are gurdwaras in and around Patna connected with the early childhood of the Guru—such as Gurdwara Maini Sangat and Gurdwara Gobind Ghat. It was in Anandpur that the Guru created the Order of the Khalsa at Takhat Kesgarh Sahib.

While travelling in the Malwa area the Guru camped at a place called Damdama, which he popularly described as *Guru ki Kashi*—a centre of higher learning for the Sikhs. A gurdwara built at this place is called Damdama Sahib, which was declared a *takhat*. During the last phase of his life the Guru went to the South India and camped at the banks of river Godawari at a place called Abchal Nagar, Hazoor Sahib, in Nanded. It was here that the Guru breathed his last. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, through his army, built a beautiful gurdwara in the memory of Guru Gobind Singh, which is popularly known as Takhat Hazoor Sahib.

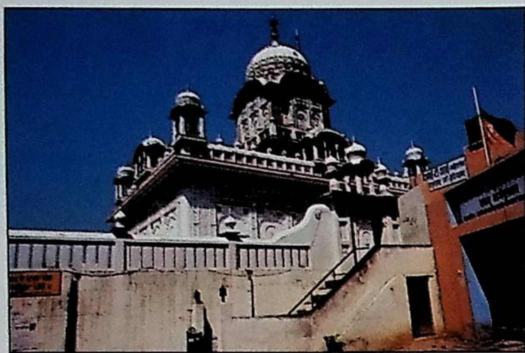
Golden Temple as the Symbol of Sikh Resilience

While all gurdwaras are equally dear to the Sikhs, with the passage of time, the Golden Temple at Amritsar has emerged as the spiritual capital of their faith and symbol of their resilience. In the course of their daily *ardas*, the Sikhs pray for a glimpse of the Golden Temple and a dip in its sacred tank. With the compilation of the Holy Book by Guru Arjan and its installation in the sanctum sanctorum, the Golden Temple has

Following double spread:
Arti being performed in Takhat Hazoor Sahib, Nanded. It was here that Guru Gobind Singh, tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs, breathed his last in AD *1708 and passed the gurugaddi to Guru Granth Sahib, which was declared as the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs.*

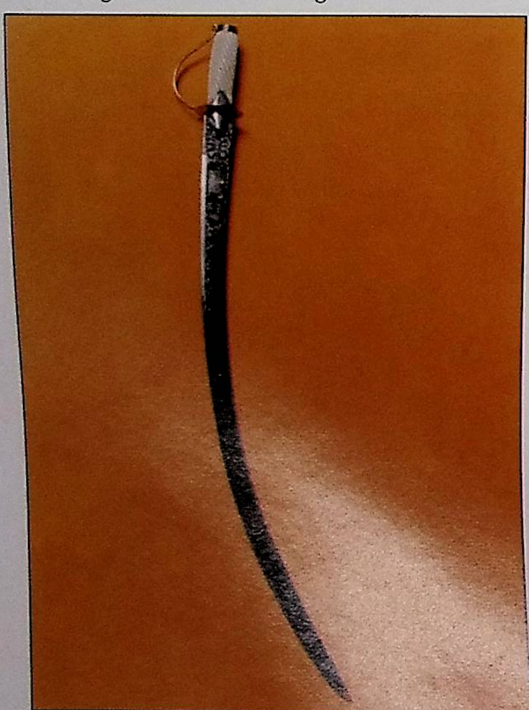






Above: Gurdwara Masatgarh, Shahbad, is associated with Banda Singh Bahadur and the Sikh misl *period.*

Below: Sword of Hari Singh Nalwa, famous General of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This sword is now preserved in Sikh Regimental Centre, Ramgarh.



become the most popular centre of pilgrimage by the devout from all over the world. Since its inception, the Golden Temple has been the main source of inspiration to the Sikh community. Among the Sikh shrines, it enjoys a unique place. Guru Arjan Dev, the founder, thus describes the glory of the place, " I have seen all places; but there is none other like Thee, for Thou were established by the Creator-Lord Himself, Who blessed Thee with glory."

Unfortunately, beauty of the place became its bane and the Golden Temple became subject of repeated invasions. Realising the importance of the Golden Temple in the Sikh psyche, successive invaders made several attempts to destroy the temple and the sacred tank around it. In April 1709, the Muslim governor of Lahore set up a police post at Amritsar and sent an army to suppress the Sikhs. Undeterred, the Sikhs continued to throng the Golden Temple and made special efforts to take a dip in the sacred tank on festive days like Baisakhi and Diwali. When Zakariya Khan, the Mughal Governor of Lahore, decided to make peace with the Sikhs in 1733 by offering the title of *Nawab* to their leader, Kapur Singh, the Golden Temple shot into prominence again. Two years later when the Mughal governor broke his promise of peace, the Temple again became the target of Mughal attacks.

Massa Ranghar, who was appointed *kotwal* of the town, befouled the sacred tank and made the Temple a rendezvous for his dancing girls. In keeping with the Sikh spirit, two devout Sikhs—Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Mehtab Singh—came out from their hide-outs in Rajasthan, entered the Golden Temple in disguise, killed Massa Ranghar in broad daylight and rode back to safety carrying the tyrant's head as a trophy.

Since Golden Temple and the sacred tank at Amritsar were the main source of inspiration to the Sikhs, Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali, after having ransacked Delhi, desecrated the Temple and defiled the sacred tank by filling it with waste and entrails of slaughtered cows. However, the Sikhs, led by Baba Deep Singh, the legendary Sikh General, attacked the Afghan soldiers, defeated and captured them and had the holy tank cleaned by the Afghan soldiers. Five years later when Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the sixth time, the Golden Temple again became the subject of attack when he got the



Above: *Gurdwara Baba Deep Singh Shaheed commemorates the martyrdom of Baba Deep Singh who fell fighting for the liberation of Amritsar from the Afghan invaders in* AD *1757.*

Below: Soldiers of XXXVI Sikh who fought the tribesmen in the North-West Frontier Province in 1897 at Saragarhi
Courtesy: Nishan III/2000

Far below: Saragarhi Memorial, Ramgarh, built to commemorate the sacrifice of twenty-two Sikh soldiers who died in the North-West Frontier defending the British post and were posthumously honoured by the British Indian Order of Merit





sacred shrine blown up with gunpowder. The Sikhs did not allow their spirit of ascendancy to dampen, gathered at the Golden Temple to celebrate the traditional festival of Diwali. Two years later Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, commander of the Dal Khalsa, gave a call for collection of funds and the rebuilding of the temple.

With the weakening of the authority of Ahmad Shah Abdali and gradual disintegration of the Mughal Empire in India, the Sikhs organised themselves into twelve confederacies or *misls* and established their supremacy over the territories conquered by each *misl*. Keeping in mind the central role that the Golden Temple played in Sikh history during turbulent days, the Sikh chiefs paid special attention to rebuilding and beautification of the Temple and the Akal Takhat.

The Golden Temple and the Akal Takhat have played a decisive role in Sikh history since their inception. It was from the sacred precincts of the Golden Temple that the Sikh Gurus issued instructions to the devout Sikhs. When the Sikh chiefs captured political power in Panjab and organised themselves in the form of twelve *misls*, they all assembled at the Akal Takhat to take important decisions. When Ranjit Singh, one of the Sikh chiefs, became the Maharaja of Panjab, the Golden Temple received special attention from him. Since Golden Temple and Akal Takhat enjoyed unique reverence among the followers of the Sikh faith, the British authorities, after taking control of Panjab, paid special attention to these shrines. Endowments made to the Golden Temple by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other Sikh chiefs were not resumed by the British. Rather than controlling the management of the Temple complex directly, they exercised indirect control through a Sikh *sarbrah* (manager) appointed by the British Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar. It was not surprising, therefore, to find the *sarbrah* and the priests of the Golden Temple complex promoting the imperial interests and condemning popular peoples' movements. (For details, see *The Golden Temple*, UBSPD and NIPS)

Ever since the Akali Movement for Gurdwara Reform (1920-25), the Golden Temple has become the nucleus of religio-political agitations of the Akalis. In independent India it was from the Golden Temple complex that the Akali Dal launched its agitation for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking

state. During the two decades of agitation, the complex remained the hub of Akali activities and focus of attention of media at home and abroad till the central government conceded their demand in 1966. Again when the Akali leadership decided to launch another powerful struggle against the central government for getting greater autonomy for the newly created state, the Golden Temple became an arena of conflict between the central government and the Akali leadership. The arena of conflict widened with the militant groups entrenching themselves in the Golden Temple complex and the government's attempt to flush them out through military action, known as Operation Blue Star, during which many innocent lives were lost and the Akal Takhat was badly damaged. Like Phoenix the Golden Temple is back to its glory and grandeur, with devotees from all over the world visiting for a glimpse of the sanctum sanctorum.

Below: Nearly two lac devotees from all over the world participated in the historic karseva *for cleansing of the sacred tank of the Golden Temple on 25th March, 2004.*
Photo: Dr. Harbir Singh



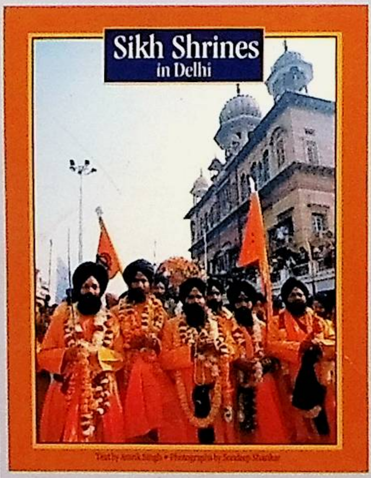
Gurdwaras in India and Pakistan

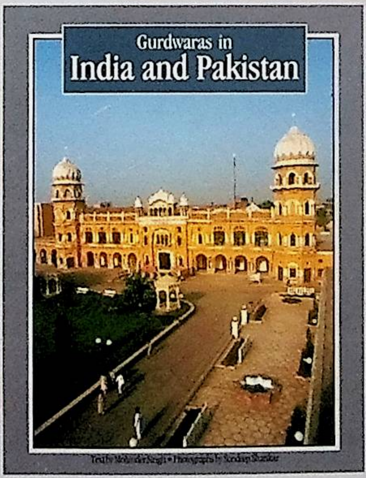
Gurdwaras were earlier called *dharamsals*, literally the abode of *dharma*, and later came to be termed gurdwaras, literally Guru's portals. Both words cannot be properly translated. The common terms like Sikh *temple* or Sikh *shrine* fail to convey the spirit behind the institution of *dharamsal* or gurdwara. Even though Sikhs' most popular Gurdwara, the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar, has come to be popularly known as the Golden Temple or Harimandir Sahib, the use of the word temple or shrine remains unsatisfactory since there is neither an altar nor an idol inside the gurdwara. On the contrary, the presiding presence in the gurdwara is that of the Holy Book, *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs. A typical gurdwara has four doors on the four sides indicating its accessibility to people from all the four directions, irrespective of caste and creed, with *Nishan Sahib* fluttering high day and night.

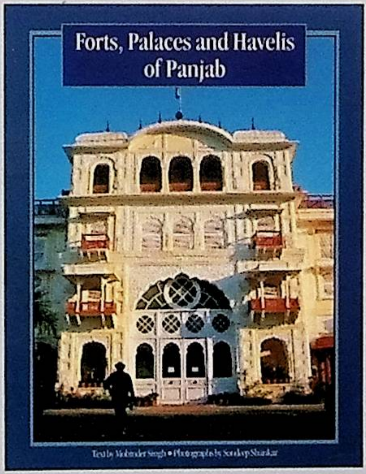
According to popular Sikh tradition, the first ever gurdwara was established at Talumbha, now in Multan District of East Panjab, Pakistan. Subsequently various other gurdwaras were established to commemorate Guru Nanak's and successive Gurus' visits to these places in different parts of India. In the initial stages the management of the gurdwaras was looked after by revered leaders appointed in their areas. Subsequently, their management came under the control of *masands*. In keeping with the Sikh tradition, they did not look upon the offerings in gurdwaras as their personal property and utilised them for the purpose of running free community kitchen. However, during the period of Sikhs' persecution in the early eighteenth century, the management of gurdwaras passed on to the hereditary *mahants* who introduced many practices which did not conform to the tenets of Sikh religion. To reform their historic gurdwaras, the Sikhs launched a movement of reform, popularly known as the Akali Movement (1920-25), which resulted in liberating their historic gurdwaras.

With text provided by Dr. Mohinder Singh, an eminent historian, the book covers the origin and development of the institution of gurdwaras and their management, and gives account of some of the major gurdwaras in India and Pakistan. Sondeep Shankar, India's leading photographer, has provided pictures for the book.

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